The Wrath of the Wolf

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The Wrath of the Wolf

by Willsblackstag

Summary

Following their fall into the sea, Will and Hannibal begin on their path of hunting down new dragons, immersing themselves in the relationships of disturbed individuals if only to avoid analysing their own. It's a matter of time, however, before something gives.

Insomnia

He had retired to bed early, knowing he would be spending a good hour staring at the ceiling, the corner of the room, the faint light reaching past the gap in the closed door. The quiet sound of music on the other side tells him Hannibal is still awake. Will wonders what he is doing. Researching their targets. Drinking wine. Finishing a drawing. This arrangement they'd fallen into after surviving their tumble from the cliff's edge had not been carefully thought out. Had not even been formally discussed or agreed upon. It was a route they busied themselves with following because it meant they didn't have to talk about what had happened up there on the bluff. His suggestion of pursuing new dragons was a diversion from the real question at hand even if it had been met without protest from Hannibal. But it is always there as an undercurrent to everything they do.

Why hadn't they killed one another yet?

Swallowing drily, he reaches for the glass on the bedside table and finds it empty. After three days without sleep, he is considering alcohol as a last resort. To flood his brain until it has no choice but to go under. Into what depths of his subconscious he dreads to think, but right now, he will take his chances in the face of restless exhaustion. Earlier, the other had found him stood in the kitchen, holding a bottle of wine. Will had asked Hannibal how many he believed it would take to get Will deliriously drunk. Hannibal had stepped closer and taken the bottle from him. With his hooded eyes on the label, he told Will that opening another floodgate would not be an effective way of washing away his troubles. Plus, he then added, *this is a really good wine*.

Rude, Will thinks to himself at the memory. Pushing aside the covers, he climbs out of bed and slowly makes his way to the door. Opening it silently, he looks through the gap. Across the landing, the door to Hannibal's room is open, but the man is not in sight. Most likely sat at his desk, he surmises. Slowly, he steps out onto the landing. Keeping his distance from the open doorway, he creeps down the stairs. When he makes it to the bottom and looks back to find no one stood at the threshold of the other's room, Will continues on his way to the kitchen.

Sneaking back inside his room, he eases the door shut and makes his way back to the bed. Leaning back against the headboard, he starts to drink from the open neck of one of the bottles. The second he has put on the bedside table. Just in case. After the first couple or so gulps, he lofts his brows. *This is really good wine*. And continues to drink until his bladder begins to protest. Leaving the empty bottle on the bed, he drags himself up into a stand. Goes to the door. Opens it. And steps out.

In his mind, the trip to the bathroom and back was an easy one. Half collapsing back onto his bed, he reaches for the second bottle. Vaguely realises he has left the door open as he continues drinking.

Next thing he knows, he is wading through the dark with a knife in his hand. Stumbling, he finds himself in a field of naked bodies. Their limbs locked haphazardly in a tattered daisy chain. The glassy surfaces of their eyes reflecting the glow of the full moon. His feet move on their own accord, navigating their own steps through crimson puddles pooling beneath legs, arms, heads. In front of him, the land, labouring beneath the weight of these overripe corpses, rises upon his approach until he finds himself climbing the slope of a hill. The further he goes, the more it becomes a steep and strenuous ascent. More than once does he stumble and feel the squelch and crunch of putrid flesh and bone under his feet until he finally falls against a vertical wall of cluttered bodies. Feet seeking purchase in soil and flesh, he starts to climb his way up, digging his knife into the mass before him and turning his face from the hot metallic sprays that sting his eyes. After what feels like endless scrabbling and catching his grip in matted hair and slack, open mouths, his very fingers grazing the

surfaces of teeth and tongue, he finally reaches the summit. Sweat sticking his clothes to his skin and his hair to his face, he drags himself up over the edge and sits there panting for his breath. As he lifts his exhausted gaze, he sees her.

Lying naked on the forest floor. Her pale skin luminous in the dark as she undulates. Her hands stroking blood over her stomach and breasts. Her thighs slowly opening. Eyes fixating on her beckoning sex, Will picks himself off the floor and goes to her. Dropping to his knees, he looms over her prone figure. Meets that lustful gaze as he presses the blade of the knife against her throat and feels the blood rushing at the sound of her excited gasp. Tugging his belt open, he hurriedly undoes his trousers.

Do it, Richard.

He feels her hand closing around his exposed dick.

Cut me.

Keeps the knife pressed against her throat as he enters her and immediately begins to move. As she gasps for her breath, he thrusts into her with increasing force until each jerk of her body beneath him brings her down upon the point of his knife.

Harder.

He complies, staring down at the pained expression on her face. Her eyes clouding with her approaching orgasm until they roll suddenly into the back of her head.

Harder!

At the sound of her desperate cry and the sensation of her body cinching tight around him, Will grabs a handful of blonde tresses. Tugs on them to bare her throat. And upon his next surge forward, thrusts the blade through her neck. Her euphoric scream cuts through him, spurring his own release as he watches the knife tearing through her larynx and feels himself exploding to the sight of severed skin, muscle and jetting arteries. Growls from the depths of his throat as he empties himself inside her convulsing body, her head hanging to the side on shredded sinews pulled taut and inviting. Twitching from his climax, he snaps suddenly at those red threads. Grinds them between his teeth. And pulls.

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He hears the sound of feet travelling across the landing and looks over his shoulder to see Will coming towards him. His shorts and tee are matted to his body with sweat. His eyes staring but unseeing. Without moving, he waits until the other breaches his personal space. Doesn't flinch when hands grab him by the front of his half-unbuttoned waistcoat, his own moving to take hold of those damp biceps. Feels the fraught tension in the bunched muscle. As Will pushes forward, he releases his grip on his arms to embrace the man and take in that familiar scent. Even though they are no longer standing at the bluff, he believes he can still smell the blood of Francis Dolarhyde. As he reaches up with a hand to clasp the back of Will's head, it dips under his palm and Hannibal feels teeth catching the side of his neck.

The force of his bite catches Hannibal off guard for a millisecond, yet he allows himself a moment longer to savour the sensation. When he feels Will breaking skin, he snares his hand in those curls. Starts to fight against the other's grip as Will bites harder. When the man refuses to relent, Hannibal grabs his throat and squeezes until he eventually falls back, gasping for air.

"That's enough," he says, but Will doesn't seem to hear him. The man lunges forward a second time, his hands on Hannibal's upper arms, holding him in place as he sinks his teeth back into his neck. Only when Hannibal digs his fingers cruelly into the stitches at his cheek does Will wrench his head away, taking with him a piece of Hannibal's skin. Hand moving to the side of his neck, he watches the paper thin flap being dragged inside Will's mouth, the sight of which stirs something within him. But before he has time to consider it more deeply, Will is moving towards him.

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He wakes to the smell of coffee and a dry bed sheet beneath him. His face aches. Lifting a hand, he touches the stitching in his cheek. Then moves his fingers to his mouth. Finds a cut in his bottom lip. His bedroom door is open. Sitting up, he looks around then does the same standing up. The wine bottles are nowhere to be seen.

When he comes downstairs and walks into the kitchen, Hannibal is stood at the coffee machine.

"Good morning," he says without looking up. His shirtsleeves are rolled up at the elbows. Will can see deep scratch marks on Hannibal's forearms.

"Where did you put them?" Will asks, sitting down at the breakfast bar.

"By them I assume you are referring to my wine," says Hannibal, placing a cup before him. Watching the steam rising from the coffee, Will reaches for it.

"I don't remember you putting your name on them," he says, lifting the cup to his lips and looking at that mild countenance.

"I thought we had decided that anything falling below a certain number of years or indeed price tag would be yours," says Hannibal, lifting his own cup and taking a sip.

"And how many of those did we buy?" says Will flatly, also taking a sip. The coffee is strong, but he carries on drinking it anyway.

Eventually, he lowers the cup. Waits for Hannibal to do the same.

"Was I drunk?" he asks.

"Did you lose control of your faculties and behaviour?" says Hannibal. "Yes."

Licking his lips and feeling the cut in his lip again, Will eyes the other warily.

"What did you do?" he utters.

"Stopped you," says Hannibal simply.

"How."

"By giving you something."

"What."

"Whatever it was, it helped you sleep, did it not?"

Hannibal watches him for a moment, unperturbed by Will's look of disapproval.

"I foresaw a lengthy and laborious night ahead of us otherwise," he continues to say, and Will scoffs, folding his arms upon the bar.

"You mean a long night spent trying to kill each other," he says. Glances at those hooded eyes. Then away again.

"I believe you were simply acting out on whoever happened to be nearest," says Hannibal offhandedly. "I was never worried."

Will feels an eyebrow raising at the comment.

"It's not like you were trying to throw us off a cliff again," Hannibal continues to say, picking up their empty cups. He gives Will a nonchalant smile before moving to the sink, as though he knows there will be no forthcoming retort. And he isn't wrong, for Will cannot think of anything to say as he sits on the bar stool, watching Hannibal turn on the tap and begin to wash the cups.

"Do you know why you can't kill me even if you tried?"

Will doesn't respond. Rinsing out the cups, Hannibal sets them on the side and turns off the tap.

"Conviction," he says, looking over. "You have to actually want it."

Will looks away from that knowing smile.

"Just tell me what's for breakfast already," he utters.

Sophia

Hannibal hears footsteps outside his door and pauses in the middle of turning the page. Closing the book, he puts it down on the bedside table and gets out of bed. Adjusting the belt of his dressing gown, he pulls open the door to find Will stood at the top of the stairs. He looks at Hannibal and clears his throat before looking away again.
"Can't sleep."
"Would you mind if I joined you?"
"No."

Will studies the small white bowl of homemade pate, knowing there would never be any recognisable shapes in the thickly blended paste, and yet looking out for them nonetheless. When Hannibal had told him he was ‘perfecting his foie gras,’ Will had searched the entire premise, even the garden shed, expecting to find someone tied down with a tube down their throat. Now he watches the glint of the butter knife as Hannibal spreads the pate evenly across a cracker and bites into it with delicate relish.
"You haven't answered my question," he says after swallowing. Will turns his eyes back on his bowl of cereal.
"I'm still thinking."
"It's not a difficult question."
"It shouldn't be, but it is," he mutters stubbornly, staring at the milk.
"Then allow me to rephrase. Are you having difficulty differentiating between your own needs and those you have empathised with?"
Will glances aside at the almost empty white bowl.
"Yes."
"May I propose an experiment of sorts that may help you separate the two?"
Will does not protest, but neither is he comfortable with where this could be going.
"An experiment?" he echoes warily.
"Yes," replies Hannibal, turning his face to look Will over like a scientist with his lab rat, and yet not entirely without fondness, "a controlled experiment, of course." When he says nothing, Hannibal tilts his head ever so slightly, eyes lidding as he continues to regard him.
"Do you trust me, Will?"
"No," he answers, frowning as he breaks eye contact to stare once more at the contents of his bowl, "but I suppose I owe you one."

The great murmuring of the room wraps around him like the bottomless depths of the sea, loud and hushed all at once. Will brushes lint from the top of his trouser leg and re-clasps his hands in his lap, watching the pockets of elegantly dressed people around him. He welcomes every small detail in what feels like a completely new environment following a period spent in relative confinement: the musical tinkle of feminine laughter, the men’s hushed, almost secretive murmurs, the seductive wafts of perfume interlaced with the more ruthless aftershave, coming and going like a constant tide around his head. He wonders how Hannibal is coping with this heady cocktail of scents and turns his head towards the bar, sees it is incredibly busy, but can just about make out the lacquered hair, the sharp cut of cheekbone. A small group of women sweep close to the settee in a sumptuous display of satin and silk, a couple of them contemplating whether or not to sit down and exchanging smiles with Will as he looks up, their eyes lingering curiously on his stitches. One of them says hello, asks if he is enjoying his evening. Will says that he is and is about to return the formality when the group starts to move away. They exchange smiles again before she merges with the other bodies, a blur of rich colours dulled by the dim lighting of the chandeliers.

“Vincent,” says the familiar voice, and Will looks over his shoulder to find Hannibal stood by the back of the settee, watching down at him with a pleased look on his face. He is holding a glass of wine in each hand while a young woman hangs by his side, looking equally as pleased; her eyes, large and wide set, are trained on Hannibal, reminding Will of a cat. “I would like you to meet Sophia,” says Hannibal, passing him a glass. “Sophia, this is Vincent.” Those feline eyes turn to Will, laps him up like a dish of milk.
“Hello, Vincent,” she says, red lips drawing back in a smile to reveal very even white teeth. Will takes a slow sip of his wine without breaking eye contact.
"Hello, Sophia."

It is with a certain glamour that the three of them climb the red carpeted marble steps of the hotel chosen by Hannibal. Sophia’s hand elegantly clutching satin the colour of the champagne bottle clutched in Will’s. Beads of condensation running down along the sleek neck and tickling the skin of his fingers. Hannibal’s left hand resting low on Sophia’s back, his fingertips stroking along the slippery satin as she moves. The room they enter is spacious, lit up by the distant glowing lights of the city through a wall of glass. Will would have been comfortable in the dark, their movements revealed only by a city light reflecting in the glassy surface of the eye, or the shining surface of a moistened lip. As though Hannibal had read his mind, he does not turn on any lights, choosing instead to bask in the almost ghostly white light coming through the window.
“Would you like some champagne, Sophia?” asks Hannibal, already moving to collect three glasses from the table. Will opens the bottle and pours a good measure into each, conscious of her eyes on him. Hannibal waits for Will to take his own glass before pacing over to the bed upon which Sophia is sat. Her eyes flicker from Will to Hannibal with anticipation.
"Now," says Hannibal with a smile, "why don't you tell us about yourself, Sophia?"

Will is not sure how long he has been in the bathroom, but he continues to stand with his hands on the edge of the sink, staring down into the bowl. When he comes back into the room, Hannibal has gone. Sophia pulls herself up into a stand, grasps the zip at her back and undoes her dress in one fell swoop. The garment falls into a shimmering pool at her feet which she steps over as she comes towards Will. He puts his hands on her waist as she tugs free his shirt and fumbles with his belt buckle. She presses her mouth against his and he kisses her back hesitantly, marvelling after such a while without having kissed another person, at the softness of lips, and the warmth of a wet tongue probing against his teeth. His body grows excited as Sophia presses against him, makes appealing little groans in between kisses as she slips her hand down to squeeze him through his trousers. Will snatches her upper arms, spins her around before pushing her down roughly against the bed and pinning both her wrists against her back.
“Do it,” she breathes, arching under his hold, “do it, Richard, *cut me.” Will inhales sharply through the nose.*
“What did you say?” he whispers, heart suddenly racing.
“Fuck me, Vincent,” Sophia murmurs sleepily into the covers, “I’ve been a bad, bad girl.”
Releasing her, Will backs into a chair and half falls into it. Sophia continues to mumble into the bed but makes no attempt to get up. When she finally rolls herself over onto her back, her eyes are closed and her lips have stopped moving. Her chest rises and falls as she sleeps. Stiffly, Will stands from the chair, walks over to Sophia's prone body and pulls the cover over her. He gives the room a careful survey before leaving.

Hannibal is found at the hotel bar, sitting in a leather armchair opposite Bedelia. Before he can attempt to rationalise the situation, his stomach sinks. A second look confirms, to Will's relief, that it is in fact merely a lookalike. He approaches in their direction. Hannibal catches sight of him from the corners of his eyes.
"Vincent," he greets Will with a pleasant smile, "is everything alright?"
"May I speak to you for a moment?" asks Will, glancing at the woman sat in the chair to find her

glancing back at him, her eyes hovering curiously on his stitches.
“Of course,” says Hannibal, turning back to the woman with a polite smile. “Please excuse me.”

The lateness of the hour has left the roads almost completely empty. As Hannibal drives down these back roads, the headlights of the car slice through the darkness to reveal the trunks of trees stretching out for miles. Watching out the window, Will half expects to see antlers.
“Do you miss Bedelia?” asks Will, breaking the silence.
“Bedelia was always good company,” replies, Hannibal. "Do you miss your wife?"
Will closes his eyes and opens them again. Is convinced he just saw the flash of a black creature running through the trees.
"Molly was always good to me."
"You mean good for you."
A pause as Will continues to stare out the window, his eyes suddenly heavy.
"I don't know what's good for me," he murmurs. "Thought I knew what was bad."
"Close your eyes, Will," says Hannibal, eyes lidded as he watches the road unravelling ahead. "Wade into the quiet of the stream."

Melissa

Just as he closes his eyes, he hears the sharp intake of breath and feels the sharp lurching of the car. His hands dart out instinctively for leverage: the handle above the window and Hannibal's right shoulder. As they swerve towards the barrier, he glimpses through the windscreen two white discs of reflected light and the dark indistinct mass of an unknown creature. The car doesn't collide with the barrier, but comes instead to a screeching stop not far from it. Unbuckling his seat belt, Will opens his door and climbs out of the car. He stands on the road watching the beast stood across them, impressed by its apathy towards their vehicle and the risk of collision. The glare of the headlights confirm it is merely an animal and not whatever creature of darkness Will has been expecting. However, this does not render it any less imposing. The harsh light reveals a tall body of exceptionally long limb, neck, and face. The monstrosity of its size and alertness suggested by large triangular ears are softened somehow by the low hanging jowls of its face.
"Here, boy," says Will out of habit, keeping his voice quiet even though it does not seem easily spooked. Its small, wide-set eyes watch Will's raised hand with mild interest. The driver's door clicks open. Those white discs turn on Hannibal as he steps out of the car.
"Have you made a new friend, Will?"

It is already with a sense of familiarity that Will walks into the kitchen. He hesitates to call it the feeling of being home, but it isn't far off. If home is a place of respite, this may be considered one of sorts. He stands there holding the brown paper bag stuffed full of tins. On their way back, they had stopped at a twenty four hour convenience store and bought whatever dog food they had in stock. Will had almost emptied the store's supplies when, stood at the till, thinking about the size of the dog, he decided to go back for the remaining cans.
"So?" he asks, watching the dog pace the perimeters of the kitchen and lower its heavy black head to sniff the edges of units and the bottoms of bar stools. "You make the place look small," he says, unable to help a half smile as he allows the old comfort of seeing man's best friend seep back into his being.
"Do you have a name?" he asks idly, sinking slowly to a squat and placing the bag down on the tiles. Mimicking his movement, the dog lowers itself into a sit, his beady eyes watching Will unblinkingly. Resting his arms atop his thighs, Will stares into black. They stay like that for a while, listening to each other's hushed breathing. Will sees a shadow emerge within those black orbs but does not break eye contact.
"Why did you leave?" he murmurs, watching the shadow linger at the doorway.
"I wanted to give you some privacy," replies Hannibal amiably. Inhaling a breath, Will slowly stands.
"You assured me," he begins to say, voice quiet and non-accusatory, "that this experiment of yours would be kept under control at all times."
"You have reason to believe it wasn't?"
Will watches down at the dog who seems determined to win the staring contest.
"You weren't there."
"No."
"Something could have happened."
"Such as?"
"To the girl."
"You mean to suggest you could have lost control and killed her?"
"Was it not implied from the moment you designed the experiment," says Will, turning around slowly to face the other. Hannibal's eyes are as black as the dog's, reflecting starkly his own reflection. The barely veiled contempt. His hands curled unconsciously into fists.
"You sound surprised, Will," says Hannibal, turning his eyes to the dog, his tone bored and flippant,

"and yet you said yes knowingly."
"Knowingly," repeats Will, grimacing.
"Knowingly," echoes Hannibal, eyes giving Will a perfunctory glance from the corners as he walks past him towards the dog, leaving Will to watch the empty threshold. He listens to Hannibal speak to the dog until he can no longer contain the disappointment. He turns his face to watch beast crouched before beast.
"I forgot I remain merely a thing to be toyed with," he says through his teeth, remembering with some bitterness the trusting naivety with which he had apologised for dragging Hannibal into his world, and the response which now galls him like a wound reopened: *I got here on my own, but I appreciate the company.*
"But you didn't get here on your own," he adds before walking away.

A week passes by, days spent tracking their two killers in relative silence save for those moments which called for dialogue: a confirmation of some sort, the flagging of potential problems ahead, going through alternative options reserved as back-up in case things go wrong. Some days saw them watching from afar, the team of people in their white overalls and brushes, the autumn wind stirring the yellow tape into a frantic rustling. Whatever unease Hannibal had managed to stir up inside Will would have been dropped, temporarily, into the dark depths until the former decided to provoke it into surfacing again. Often, Will would find himself stood beside Hannibal at a crime scene with his eyes closed, shutting the falling swirl of rust red leaves from his sight before the swing of the yellow pendulum returned them to him in all the mellow gradients of a sunset, still fixed to their branches. It is this notion of industry that keeps Will occupied and from dwelling on anything he would deem unproductive - questions he still has and knows he won't get the answers for, be they aimed at the man he is stuck with or himself. Sometimes, staying busy lends Will a pretend calm which he nevertheless embraces, especially at the end of a long day when, within the walls of their retreat from what feels like the rest of the world, something inside him relaxes a little and his spirits lighten just like any ordinary soul returning home from work. When Will appears content, it seems to affect Hannibal too, and sometimes this leads to less guarded conversation.
“It's nice to see you in good spirits,” Hannibal had said one evening at the dining table. Will had looked up from his food, chewing and smiling before falling back to his meal.
“Did you masturbate?” Hannibal had then asked with a tilt to his head. And Will had responded as though the other had asked if he’d remembered to feed the dog. He had lofted his eyebrows while forking more vegetables and stuffing them into his mouth.
“Did you?” he had eventually asked back, but before Hannibal could reply, Will had cut him off with his mouth full.
“I don't want to know.”

“So,” Hannibal says, the first word spoken in what seems like hours since they’d arrived. Previously, the only sounds keeping them company were that of leaves stirred by the wind and the odd rustling of wings from above; safely out of reach, the birds themselves deemed it too soon to be sharing their birdsong let alone leave the warmth of their nests. Will imagines sinking through the blanket of leaves beneath him, past the heavy damp earth, straight down into some secret womb where he would hibernate like a bear, blissfully oblivious until it realised there was a flea in its ear.

“What pleasurable pastimes are shared by the Graham household on the day of rest?” asks Hannibal.
“Pleasurable by whose standards?” Will utters, continuing to search for any signs of disturbance through the binoculars. Looking down through the thick web of shedding treetops from this angle, the forest below is deceptively peaceful.
“Walter’s. Molly’s. Yours.”
Will glances askance at Hannibal resting on his belly with his arms bent in front of him like an idle lion. If there is a vantage point higher than theirs, Will would loathe for an outsider to come across them now: two men lying prone on the ground, buried slowly by falling leaves.

“Not this,” Will mutters, turning his eyes back into the binoculars.
“The predator reveals its true self upon seeing its prey,” Hannibal exhales as he rolls over onto his back with a dry rustling.
“Someone’s coming,” says Will under his breath. He follows with his binoculars the two figures moving into view. Recognises the pale golden hair worn loose on the female, fluttering bright in the dim. Her partner walks more slowly, at a short distance behind her, head down as she leads the way.
“They’re early,” says Hannibal, voice hushed.
“They’ve stopped,” Will half-whispers, watching the man continue to stare at the ground and wondering what new and unpredictable thoughts could be running through the head of a killer. “Why hesitate?”
“He isn’t,” Hannibal corrects and Will breaks briefly from the binoculars to look at him, lying with his hands clasped over his stomach. “You know this,” Hannibal adds, and it is true. They both know what is about to happen, Will more clearly than Hannibal; he can see the glint in her eye when she looks back, as though he is down there, stood behind her himself, inhales deep into his nostrils the same dank scent of leaves scattered up against the dark as he picks up his feet, gains speed, and tackles her down into the earth. The distant sound of their fall does not appear to interest Hannibal. He seems distracted by the leaves spiralling out of the sky and landing always at a touch away, as though repelled by some invisible barrier. The binoculars are still in Will’s hands, temporarily forgotten as the sounds of struggle and sex travel up towards them from the forest floor below. He watches Hannibal picking up a splayed leaf from where it had managed to brush against his face, steal a kiss from that cruel mouth. Heavy-lidded eyes turn on Will, watching him from the corners.
“You're not observing,” Hannibal murmurs from beneath the leaf obscuring the lower half of his face like a fan. “Perhaps you find it more pleasurable, staring at my face.”
Will holds the other's gaze flatly. Hannibal says nothing further as the bestial sounds of coupling echo in the air around them. Breaking eye contact, Will shifts on his arms and tugs up the collar of his coat. He settles to watch with the same indifference as watching a sports match. Perhaps the repetitive nature of mental emphatic re-enactments has dulled any immediate sexual inspiration, no matter how keenly he had felt those initial pangs of sexual hunger when he first relived the scene. He admitted that sometimes he came out of his trances a little warmer than before, and he suspected Hannibal could smell his perspiration, not that the other ever cared to comment, which was a relief.
“We could kill them now,” says Hannibal lightly, tapping the dead leaf against his mouth by the stalk.
“No,” says Will. “They’d enjoy that.”
They wait until they have finished. Then they make their way down, emerging from the shadows of the trees together. Mirroring their enemy who greets them with calm, self-possessed indifference.
“Hello, Richard. Melissa,” says Hannibal as though to old friends. “You two have been very, very naughty.”

As though a signalling shot has been fired, the predators turned prey immediately dart in opposing directions, followed in hot pursuit by Will and Hannibal. The man is of similar stature to Will, and as he chases him deep into the belly of the forest past towering trees, leaping over those which have fallen, he experiences the surreal sensation of racing his own shadow. When the pursued looks back over his shoulder, Will is convinced he is staring back at himself. They soon find themselves storming onto higher ground and in the back of his mind, Will knows they are nearing the upper perimeters deemed off-limits in prior discussions with Hannibal, yet he cannot successfully steer the other away. Teeth gritted and bared as he sucks in deep lungfuls of bitter forest air, Will pushes on until Richard is almost within arm’s reach. Just as he considers bridging the final distance between them with a leap and tackle, they approach the end of the forest floor far more suddenly than anticipated and Will has to latch onto the low branch of a nearby tree to stop himself following the man as he hurtles off the cliff into the water below. Looking down at the tossing currents, Will curses under his breath as he loses sight of Richard. Reminded of the weight of the piece tucked into his belt and digging into his skin, he turns and hurries back to Hannibal, reaching behind and under his coat for the handle of the gun.

Will finds them on the ground. Hannibal pinning the female down. His chest pressing against her back as he snatches at her jerking wrists. Their eyes on the razor blade flashing white in the dark. His finger twitches against the trigger, but he doesn't move. Catching his breath from the chase, Will watches the struggle from a distance as though he were observing the forced breeding of two formidable beasts. He sees Hannibal grabbing a handful of her hair before pushing her head down into the leaves the same time he wrestles the razor from her fingers. His own blood sluicing down his palm in the process to stain his shirt cuff. He looks up then, staring darkly at Will with silent adrenaline. His lips parted to his shallow breaths. A keening sound slips past the girl's, stirring the delicate strands of hair stuck to the plush, moist surfaces of her mouth, and Will suddenly feels it taking hold of him. A burgeoning lust choking the words from his throat as it leads him to her, a step at a time, until he is standing there, staring down at them. Beneath his stare, she arches her body. Pushes back against Hannibal. He watches her lick her lips. Her eyes burning into him. And he knows it is no longer a roleplay in the safe boundaries of his mind. He licks his lips absently, head tilting as his mouth opens but nothing comes out. His eyes beginning to grow unfocused.
"Will," says Hannibal, voice low and steady, drawing Will's gaze to himself. As though reminded of his purpose, he unfixes himself from the spot, pulls the penknife from his back pocket. Bends one knee upon the ground. Against Melissa's renewed struggling, Hannibal tightens his grip on her cool blond tresses, pulls her head up and back to bare her throat the same time the exposed blade is dragged across her skin.

By the time they return to the house, the skies have lightened to a blueish hue. Hannibal carries the body, wrapped head to toe in a blanket, through the threshold. The sight strikes Will as a macabre parody of newlywed tradition.
"Take a shower, Will," says Hannibal on his way to the kitchen. Will closes the front door, shutting out the birdsong of early morning. He wants to press his brow against the firm wood and hold onto the solid brass handle as he gradually breathes the rattling out of his nerves. Gradually, he becomes aware of a bereft sensation pooling into his chest even while his bloody fingertips continue to twitch with spasmodic energy. He feels eyes on him and turns from the door to see Hannibal studying him from the kitchen. Acquiescing under the other's stare, Will heads toward the staircase.

Cold water strikes his trembling body, and he swallows down a gasp as he braces one hand against the tiles whilst rubbing over his blood-stained face with the other. He thinks he can taste Melissa in the rivulets trickling into his gaping mouth. Thinks he can taste Hannibal from when he'd grasped the other's slashed hand to pull him up onto his feet. The sensation of warm wet blood gushing from the wound in Hannibal's palm had given Will a strangely lightheaded feeling, and instinctively he had tightened his grip and felt a sharp thrill from deep down when he could feel the hard throb of the other's pulse. He had also enjoyed seeing the twitch in Hannibal's lip.

He folds his arms against the tiles and presses his face into them, waiting for the urge to subside. And yet he knows each second will not only fail to placate, but slowly whip his pulse into a frenzy. Soon, illustrating the blank of his closed eyelids in vivid detail, are scenes which both torment and bring forth a deep unspeakable pleasure.

He sees Sophia. She is naked on the hotel bed as Will thrusts into her body from behind. He is unable to break from Hannibal's gaze while the other ruts simultaneously into her mouth. Then she is swiftly replaced by Melissa and they are back in the forest. Hannibal buried in her naked and arching body, blonde tresses wrapped around his fists like reins. Will pulling in and out of her throat across him. Hannibal's panting in his ears. The sounds leaving Will's lips feral and urgent. The gleaming sweat on their naked skin illuminated by the moonlight.

Eyes shut, Will bites onto his arm, squeezing the flesh between his teeth until he feels it tearing through him with a vengeance.

Dinner

Next morning, Will comes into the kitchen to find Hannibal cooking breakfast. The sight of the other moving around in his half apron and rolled-up shirtsleeves reminds Will this is real. They are really here. Yesterday really happened, and afterwards, he had slept. He had fallen into such a deep sleep that he hadn't realised the dog had climbed onto him. When he'd opened his eyes in the dream, he had seen the broken stag on top of him, its pointed rack reaching close to his face. A dark red fountain began to pour down onto him from where its head should have been. As it washed over his face, he had woken with a hoarse cry and violent shudder, confused by the sight of the dog at first, then grateful for its heavy, grounding presence.
"You look well," says Hannibal, putting a plate down in front of Will.
"I slept well," he replies, reaching a hand down to rub the dog's head. "For the most part," he adds, picking up the fork. *Eggs benedict. Not human.*
"What did you see?" asks Hannibal curiously, and Will chews and swallows before answering.
"Blood."
He puts another piece into his mouth, glancing up as he chews. Hannibal is watching him closely, also chewing. The act is humdrum for the rest of humanity. He doesn't know when he started noticing it's different for Hannibal. He has sat across the other since the beginning and watched him eat countless times. But now he cannot watch those subtle movements of lips and jaw without also contemplating certain adjectives. *Cruel. Merciless. Sinister. Sensual. Maybe. He realises he has stopped chewing, but is still watching Hannibal. He returns his attention to his plate.*
"There's always blood," he adds in a murmur. "What will we do about the one that got away?"
"Wait and see," says Hannibal simply. "It's more fun that way."

Each tug of the leash pulls him deeper into the mist, and he struggles to rein the dog in one-handed. In his other hand, the fishing rod is a familiar and comforting weight. Behind him, Hannibal carries a small camp chair under his arm and a basket containing the rest of his fishing gear.
"Did you know our killers discovered their next victims in this same forest?" says Hannibal, his eyes watching the tops of the trees. "Sisters," he adds. "In love."
"Did they mean to punish?"
"Only the happiness of others."
They walk deeper into the forest. The dog leads them as it roots through the carpet of dry leaves.
"What about you, Will?" asks Hannibal suddenly. "Would you punish us?"
Will doesn't know how to take the question.
"They punish those who are happy and in love?"
"I believe so."
"Then no, I wouldn't punish us."

Having changed into his bib and brace, Will pulls on the matching coat, adjusts the cap on his head and picks up his fishing rod. The mist hangs thick and low over the still water of the lake, creating a surreal atmosphere that is broken occasionally by the appearance of birds swooping low across its surface. Will looks over his shoulder at Hannibal. He is sat in the small camp chair with his sketchbook open in his lap. The dog is lying on the ground beside him. Will heads toward the lake, moving down the sloping bank in his wellingtons and trying not to slip on the slick layer of leaves plastered over one another. Gently, he steps in where there is a natural dip in the lake and the water is relatively deep. He begins to wade out further, breathing the mist down into his lungs. The current folds around him, holding him steady within its palm as he prepares to cast his line. The quiet babble of the water fills his ears, massages the edges of his brain while he ties the hook. He has missed this. Reaching into the pocket of his bib, he pulls out a synthetic bait and remembers doing the same with Abigail stood beside him.

He is about to cast when he hears the dog. Its deep barks resonate through the air around him. He turns his head toward the rustling that grows louder as it nears him, and sees a squirrel leaping out onto the bank. There is a pounding of feet and then a flurry of leaves as the dog bounds into sight and proceeds to chase it. At the other end of the taut lead, is Hannibal. He seems to be having trouble detaching the lead from his wrist. Stood still, Will watches the other staggering by towards the water. He can hear Hannibal curse in Lithuanian just before he trips and falls in. There is a struggle as the dog continues to drag him further into the water, and when he finally manages to detach himself from the lead, Will glances down at the bait in his hands, forgetting to hide his smile.

Will finishes lining the mould with the bacon. Hannibal steps over with his bowl and spoons in the meat mixture. Under the other's watch, Will folds the bacon over before covering the top of the tray with baking paper and sealing with tin foil. Hannibal secures the lid with string and picks up the mould, placing it into a roasting pan as Will pours in hot water from the kettle until it reaches halfway up the sides. He carries the pan to the oven as Hannibal opens the door and slots it gently into the heat. Hannibal closes the door and they return to the large ovenproof dish on the hob.

Hannibal hands him a bottle of red wine, and Will opens it, releasing another rich aroma into the kitchen. Slowly, he pours the contents into the dish. Unsure of how much he should be emptying, Will pauses and feels Hannibal's hand closing over his on the bottle. It pushes down until the wine floods the vegetables and meat and sends the bouquet garni afloat.
“We'll add the veal jus when the liquid has reduced by half,” says Hannibal, removing his hand. Will lifts the bottle and drinks deeply from the mouth. He knows he is being rude. He is aware of being watched. Lowering the bottle, Will looks over at Hannibal, swallowing his last mouthful and licking his lips. He offers him the bottle, but Hannibal declines.
“Finish it,” he says.
So Will does, letting the warmth distract him from the troubling thought of dinner. For him, the handling of human meat is still easier than actually having to eat it.

Hannibal places the plate down on the table in front of him. Arranged in a neat row, three medallions sit atop individual beds of mashed potato in a dark pool of sauce. The minimalist presentation is finished off with a touch of green and purple watercress. Will looks up across the table at Hannibal. Picking up his knife and fork, Hannibal slices off a corner of his terrine and a slither of his poached pear. He spears the two together on the end of his fork before lifting it to his parting lips, eyes closing as he takes the morsel into his mouth. Will watches him chew and pause, savouring the taste. He looks down at his own plate again and picks up the fork. Sinking it into a medallion, he lifts it from the mash and waits for the excess sauce to stop dripping before bringing it closer to his mouth. Before it gets too close, however, he lowers it back down on the plate and cuts it in half, then quarters. He stabs the smaller piece with his fork, aware all the while that Hannibal is watching.

“You don't have to eat it,” says Hannibal. His voice is dangerously monotonous. Will watches the dark piece of meat at the end of his fork. He can hear Hannibal cutting off more of his terrine and pear.
“It looks good,” he says quietly, honestly, slowly lowering his knife and fork. “I just find the thought of her entering my bloodstream...” He hesitates uncomfortably, feeling it would be rude to continue.
“Disgusting?” offers Hannibal, his tone light.
“Difficult,” corrects Will, glancing up again at the other and feeling apologetic for the meticulously laid table. Hannibal takes his time with his food, saying nothing. Will drinks more wine as he watches him eat, listening to the faint grating of cutlery against porcelain.
“Perhaps you would prefer the flesh of a child,” says Hannibal eventually without looking at Will. “There's a certain pleasure in eating the innocent. I know of those who delight in such a practice. All of them self-righteous pigs.” He stops, as though annoyed at himself, and swallows before touching the stem of his glass. Will picks up his fork. He puts the morsel into his mouth and slowly chews

before swallowing. He looks up at Hannibal who looks away while pushing back in his chair. Taking his wine glass, he leaves the table.

Will wakes in the middle of the night with a pained shout. He is trembling all over and frozen to the bone. He dreamt he was eating Melissa alive as she writhed against the forest floor. Hannibal's hand was pressing down on his head, and it wouldn't let go until Will had finished. Pushing the sodden sheets off his body, Will staggers out of his room with a sudden, overwhelming feeling of nausea.

The bathroom is occupied, but Will doesn't think he can hold it back in time to find somewhere else. Pushing down on the door handle, he realises the door is unlocked, and hurries over to the toilet. He doesn't even have time to lift the seat before emptying the contents of his last meal into the bowl. Immediately, he flushes the mess away, relieved it is out of his system. He knew he shouldn't have been so stubborn as to eat more than he could bear.
“I told you not to eat it,” says a voice behind him. Will wipes his mouth and glances over his shoulder from where he's still crouched in front of the toilet.
“You were angry,” he utters, lifting his eyes up the other's bare legs and skipping the rest of him to meet Hannibal in the eye. His hair is plastered over his eyes and dripping droplets onto the floor. His dark eyes are half closed as he watches down at Will. The air is damp with steam.
“Are you afraid, Will?” he says quietly, and Will slowly straightens up to turn around and stand across from him. “That if you don't stay, I will kill your family?”
He takes a step closer.
“That's not why I'm here," says Will, voice also quiet.
“A sacrifice to placate the monster you failed to destroy," he continues to utter, coming close enough for Will to feel the heat radiating off his wet body. “Keeping your enemies close.”
For a moment, Will says nothing as he frowns at Hannibal who continues to watch him. Then, the staring contest ends as Hannibal looks towards the doorway and leaves Will standing alone to head towards it.

Verger

Less than a week following Melissa's death, a double murder is reported. The location is a room in a motel. The victims are young. One male, one female. Both had their throats cut. Forensic evidence suggests they could have been engaging in sexual acts with their murderer. It strikes Will as an erratic incident. If this was their man, his actions could have been driven by grief for losing his partner in crime. The distant flash of headlights cuts through the dimness of a grey morning. Will suspects it could belong to the vehicle of a detective, and swiftly takes his leave of the place, making his way back to Hannibal and the car.

In the evening, Will returns from walking the dog to find Hannibal dressed to go out. His hair is lacquered and he is holding a pair of leather gloves in his hands.
“Are we going out again?” he asks.
“I am going to pay Alana a visit,” answers Hannibal. Will leans down to release the dog from the leash and straightens back up. It is hard to mask his confusion.
“Is she expecting you?” he asks.
“No,” answers Hannibal.
“No,” he echoes the other, as though he had not heard correctly and needs it repeated.
“No,” repeats Hannibal.
“Why?”
“It is overdue.”
“What is?”
"My visit."
There is a long and uncomfortable pause.
“Will you harm her?”
“Will you join me if I do?”
“You know I won't.”
“Not even to stop me?”
Will can't reply to that. Something Hannibal had said to him suddenly returns. *You have to want it. He walks past Will, pulling on his gloves. Then he opens the front door and steps outside, closing it behind him.*

She doesn't know when he will come, only that she will see him again. Sitting up, she reaches for the bottle and is about to pour herself another glass when the doorbell rings. She continues to pour herself another, and leans back in the armchair, sipping on the wine in silence. She expects him to make his own way in, but there is no other movement in the house. Finally, she gets up, taking the glass with her to the front door. Opening it, she is greeted by his familiar smile.

Will doesn't know how long he has been sitting in the living room, staring at the unlit fireplace. The leash lies across his lap, forgotten. The dog noses at his hand, and he pats it absently on its head. Getting out of the armchair, he leaves the living room and climbs the stairs to Hannibal's room. The door is open as usual. He steps inside, walking past the made bed to the desk at the far end of the room. He searches through the drawers and pauses when he finds it. A dark green journal sitting on its own. Hesitantly, he picks it up and puts it down on the desk. Opening the cover, he turns the pages until he comes across the word, Verger, written in Hannibal's scrawl. Below it is a number.

When Alana stirs, it is not from the tickling of Margot’s hair or the soft breath that leaves the slightly parted lips resting close to her neck. It is a feeling that their safety has been compromised, something that is common to those living in constant fear of being hunted. Gently slipping from beneath Margot’s arm, Alana climbs out of bed, the marble floor icy against the soles of her feet. Instinct pulls

her in the direction of their son's room past the wide staircase across the landing. Here, the large, bare window running the length of the opposing wall reveals the pink and orange gradients of approaching daybreak.

Nearing the bedroom, she stops when she sees the door is ajar. Listening, she hears the hushed voice of her child speaking, followed by an answering voice that is equally as familiar. She holds her breath. She should have taken the gun from the bedside table. She can't go back for it now. Pushing the door open, its edge swings back to reveal her boy, stood in the middle of his bedroom with his back to her, his brown hair tousled from sleep. The curtains are drawn. The room is dark. But Alana can't mistake what she sees, even if she can never understand it.
"Hannibal," she says in quiet greeting. The boy looks back at his mother. She extends a hand from her side and he goes to her.
"Alana. You don't look surprised to see me."
Alana pets the hair of her son without taking her eyes off Hannibal. The child wraps his arms around her leg, pressing his cheek against the soft satin of her pyjamas and watching Hannibal from the corner of his eye.
"Not anymore."
Hannibal tilts his head.
"I see you live perpetually within the earshot of armed men."
"It's not ideal," she says calmly, lifting her chin. "Why are you here, Hannibal."
"To keep a promise."
"You've come to kill me."
"The boy lacks a father figure."
"Words fail to describe the feeling when I imagine you as a father."
A pause as Alana tighens her grip on her son's hand.
"He doesn't belong to you."
Hannibal steps towards them. It takes every ounce of control in Alana not to step back. He crouches down to smile at the boy.
"But you see, Alana. You all belong to me."
A voice from the landing steals their attention. Hannibal stands and looks past her shoulder.
"Hello, Margot," he says in greeting.

Alana backs with the child onto the landing. Behind her, Margot is frozen to the spot. Her arms are wrapped tight around herself, her hands clutching white-knuckled at the silk of her dressing gown. Reaching the stairs, Hannibal begins his descent. Alana follows him with her eyes. Her son moans quietly because she's squeezing his hand too hard. She does not notice Margot has slipped back to their bedroom until her reemergence a second later. Her bare feet thud heavily onto the landing.
"No," Alana cries as Margot stands in front of her, shielding both her lover and their son as she pulls the trigger on the pistol. The sound scares the child. Alana stares as the bullet punctures the back of Hannibal's coat, stopping him mid-step. He turns to look up at them as though they have merely thrown a stone at him. There is a rapidly spreading shadow beneath his coat. Blood drips onto cold white marble.
"Careful, Margot," says Hannibal. "You're not setting a very good example."

It has been almost two days since Hannibal left the house. During this time, Will had investigated two murders which turned out to be unrelated to their killer. Alone in his investigations, the yellow flash of the pendulum continued to reveal the facts of the crimes without answering the more important question: *when was Hannibal coming back?*

Heading home after a long walk, Will is preparing himself for another evening alone when the dog begins to bark and pull excitedly at the leash. Heart rate increasing, Will unclips the dog and reaches inside his coat, closing his hand around the handle of his gun as he slowly climbs the steps of the

porch. When he opens the door and steps inside, he sees the kitchen light is on. The dog hurries in its direction before he can stop him, and he closes the door behind him before following cautiously. Hannibal is in the kitchen. He has crouched down to pat the dog who keeps nosing into his clothes excitedly. He is wearing a black shirt with its sleeves rolled up to the elbows. His hair is not lacquered and falls in soft spikes across his eyes.
“Hello, Will," he says, fussing over the dog. “I've brought us a new family member.”
His stomach drops. A sickening sense of dread overriding the nervous relief of seeing the other again.
“What are you talking about?” he asks, voice quiet, as though afraid to hear the answer. Hannibal continues to play with the dog.
“He's going to love you,” he murmurs to it. “Yes he is.”
Will finds the way he's talking to the animal false and offensive.
“Did you kill them?” he asks bluntly, not enjoying the condescending look in Hannibal's eyes when he finally looks up at him.
“Who?”
“You know who.”
“You mean, Will,” says Hannibal, straightening up into a stand. “Did I kill Alana and Margot?”
His eyes, black and unreadable, stare at Will, compelling him to maintain eye contact.
“I had neither Chiyoh nor Abigail with me,” he says, slowly stepping across the kitchen floor. “And you, Will, on the other end of the line. Just like old times.”
Will takes a hesitant step back.
"Was it not what you expected?" he retorts with a frown.
"I have no expectations of you," says Hannibal expressionlessly as he draws closer.
"No, of course not,” spits Will quietly. “You were *curious."*
Hannibal stops within arm's reach in front of him.
“Where is he?” Will asks, voice low.
"In your room,” Hannibal answers simply. “I can get rid of him if he's too much for you.”
Taunted by his cold and indifferent syllables, by the suggestion that Hannibal did this for him, Will curls his hands into fists.
"You've reached a new low," he says darkly, stepping right up to Hannibal.
"My thought precisely when I found myself at the bottom of the sea.”
"I should've left you there," says Will, not truly meaning it, but angry nonetheless. Hannibal regards him impassively.
“What stopped you?”

Hurt, Will grabs Hannibal by the front of his shirt and smacks the hard ridge of his fist into his cheek. In return, Hannibal throws a punch that catches the bridge of Will's nose. With a sudden urgency, they start grappling with each other, hands grabbing at shirts and hair in their attempt to overpower the other. Somehow, they end up on the floor. The skin over knuckles have split, as have the soft skin of lips. Bruises begin their early blossoms on the bridges of noses, eyebrows, cheekbones. With a grunt, Will pins Hannibal beneath him. He lands blow after blow across his face until Hannibal catches his wrists. Chests heaving from exertion, they glare at each other in their renewed struggle against the other's grasp until Will breaks eye contact. There is a dull sheen in Hannibal's shirt. A large dark stain that has spread from his shoulder. Hannibal takes advantage of Will's hesitation to dislodge him with a sharp jerk of his knee straight into his stomach. Biting back a groan of pain, Will topples to the side and braces his hands against the tiles. Gasping for his breath, he watches Hannibal slowly rolling onto this side and dragging himself up into a crooked stand. The stain is more widespread at the back of Hannibal's shirt. There is blood on the tiles from where he had been lying. Will feels concern, strong and traitorous, escape into his blood, cooling the rush of adrenaline. He pushes up from the floor and staggers to a stand.
“You're injured?” he says, hating to ask, but wanting to know.
“Go to him,” Hannibal utters as he strides hastily out of the kitchen and towards the front door. Will starts to follow, but Hannibal pulls open the door and slams it behind him. Will hears the rumble of

the car engine and stands there listening to it. When it has completely faded away into the distance, he turns his eyes towards the stairs.

When he reaches the landing, he finds the dog pawing at his bedroom door. Leading it into Hannibal's room, he closes the door before returning to stand in front of his. He feels he ought to say something, but can't think of the words. Slowly, he opens the door. His room is how he has left it. There is nobody on his bed. Instinct makes him grab hold of the edge of the door and look behind it. The black eyes of a dog, the same dog as the one in Hannibal's room, stares up at him. Will stares back.

The next day is marked with absence. Absence of the smell of coffee. Absence of the sight of Hannibal preparing food in the kitchen which now looks void of purpose. Absence of music drifting quietly from Hannibal's room. The following day is the same. Again, Will busies himself with any cases which have sprung up in the area, distracting himself between murder scenes and looking after both dogs. After two weeks, the same question haunts him from the first morning he started to lose sleep again since he watched Hannibal walk out of the house. *What if he doesn't come back?*

Bedelia

The harshness of the afternoon is filtered into a soft gold by the veils drawn low across the windows. He is sat with his legs stretched out before him on the settee. The gentle light warms the chilled skin of his bare chest and exposes the open bullet wound. Sat in the armchair across from her guest, she observes his profile. Eyes closed, perhaps to ground himself in the comforting familiarity of her home. It is a sign of weakness that reminds her of another time, in a different location, but the cause of which remains the same.

“You return here like a wounded beast,” she says quietly, tilting her head. “Where have I seen that before?”
A smile lifts the corners of his lips and he turns his face in her direction.
“Are you going to put me out of my misery?”
“If I don’t, I know who will.”
The smile stays as he turns his face away.
“Do you wish I had remained at the bottom of the sea?” he asks.
“Do you?” she asks back.
“It’s peaceful,” he says. “Accepting death.”
“You never were one for the quiet life.”
There is a lull in the conversation as neither says anything for a while.
“Is it difficult to accept he warned them?” she finally asks.
“A family where all members behaved themselves would not be a family at all,” he replies.
“A family can ostracise members who betray them,” she counters. “Or they can forgive. How many times will you forgive a dog for biting the hand that feeds?”
He seems to consider that question for a moment.
“The dog is a confused animal. It thinks it wishes to obey a master who will love and feed it only to turn on said master to serve its own instincts.”
She seems to consider his response for a moment.
“Maybe you should get a cat,” she says eventually.
“Maybe I should.”

In Hannibal's absence, he has a recurring dream every other night. The situation is straightforward. Hannibal goes to the Vergers and is killed. The setting, however, changes each time because he has no idea where they live and what their estate looks like. It always begins with a close up of Hannibal’s legs from behind. Sometimes he will be walking over white gravel towards an elaborate gate. Other times, the gravel is replaced by grey cobble. If the Verger estate does not feature stern, Roman columns flanking a Georgian façade, then it gives him Gothic arches and garish gargoyles. The gate is always tall and made of iron. Similar to the gate of Hannibal’s old home. Sometimes the dream leads him into the house, up the stairs, and into the bedroom where Alana and Margot are sleeping with a child between them. Always stood behind Hannibal, he’d watch the blood running free from their throats. But more often than not, he sees the family surprise their intruder, and when Hannibal falls to the ground, his face is turned away, and all Will can see is the blood pouring onto the floor from the hole in the back of his head.

He is tired of waking up to his own cries followed by silence. The house is too quiet, and he attempts to remedy that by having the radio on constantly. He spends more hours at crime scenes and when he returns to the house, he’ll quickly feed the dogs and himself before taking them out on long extended walks. He got lost on a couple of occasions because his mind had been on other things. Gradually, he became aware of alternating feelings. At times, he wanted to stop caring and live like a normal human being until the police found him. At others, he wanted to resume whatever he’d been doing with

Hannibal. He even entertained, for the briefest of moments, the thought of living like a normal human being with Hannibal until the police found them. But that was insane.

In Hannibal's absence, he has also made something of a routine for himself. The mornings are reserved for sleeping over hangovers ever since he took up drinking late into the evenings. The afternoons are for investigations when he'll stay out for as long as he can until he starts worrying about the dogs. The evening's objectives never change. Return to the house. Check the dogs. Feed them. Feed himself. Take the dogs out for a walk. Come back to the house. Light the fireplace in the living room. Sit in the armchair in front of the fire. Open a bottle.

Occasionally, he breaks routine by finding himself in Hannibal's room. After a week, he had returned to the large desk to see if he could find any clues as to where the other could have gone. Now he comes to sit in the desk chair. Drinking from a bottle. Thinking. Now and then, he will go into Hannibal's open wardrobe to look at his belongings. A row of suits and waistcoats of different patterns and hues. Shoes polished and tucked into their own sections. Ties sat in an organiser like different species of insects. A bottle of aftershave which he always lifts to his nose on passing and sprays himself with when exceptionally inebriated. He would wake up smelling of Hannibal though he no longer mistakenly thinks the other is there in the initial confusion of waking.

He knows washing the dogs would be a challenge, but feeling particularly uneasy this evening, he welcomes any distraction. It is difficult to separate the two Danes, and he doesn't want one scratching down the door while he shuts himself in the bathroom with the other. So he lets them both in, but can only fit one in the bath tub. He tries the usual technique of speaking in a quiet and calm voice, but in response to the water, both dogs react far worse than he can imagine. Close to being trampled underfoot, Will can't tell if their barking is a sign of panic or play. The bathroom is not big enough for them to run around in, and Will has no choice but to open the door. He shouts at them to get out, which they do, knocking him aside in the process. Sat on the soaked bathroom floor, he listens to them bound downstairs and continue barking the house down.
"You win this time," he shouts, getting up and considering a change of clothes. His shorts and tee are sticking to him in various places where he got splashed by the dogs. He wasn't the most prepared for this challenge, he realises. He didn't even bring enough towels. The dogs are still barking. Stepping out of the bathroom, he walks over to the stairs.
"Alright," he shouts, starting to climb down. "I said you win-"
He pauses halfway. Amidst the barking, he had heard his voice.

He takes another hesitant step down until he is stood across the kitchen threshold. Despite not feeling great for the past couple of days, he doubts his judgement has become so impaired as to be conjuring things from his own imagination.
"Where is your master?" asks the voice, and Will paces hesitantly to the threshold, hand bracing against the doorframe.

Hannibal is sitting on the floor. The dogs are all over him and must have knocked him over in their excitement. He tolerates their fussing a moment longer before pulling himself up into a stand. There are no cuts or bruises on his face anymore.
"Hello, Will," he says quietly, eyes meeting his.
For a moment, he doesn't reply. Then, lowering his hand from the doorframe, he releases the breath he realises he had been holding.
"Hey," he finally utters.

Richard

“You look terrible,” says Hannibal, looking him over.
“It was a bad idea,” Will begins to say, bringing a hand up to rub at the back of his neck.
“You’re not well,” the other interrupts, drawing attention to his untidy state.
“I’m fine,” he lies. He knows he must look a little worse for wear. He feels it, too. In comparison, Hannibal looks immaculate. Lacquered hair, a three piece suit Will hasn’t seen before. No bruises blemishing his calm demeanour. He remembers how Hannibal had looked the last he saw him. “And yourself?” he asks in return.
“I am well,” answers Hannibal as he faces the sink. He turns on the tap and washes his hands. The dogs have settled upon the floor.
“So you’re back?” Will utters. Hannibal turns from the sink, drying his hands on a tea towel. He walks past the dogs until he’s stood in front of him.
“More reason for you to look after yourself,” he says, resting a hand on Will’s shoulder and the other over his brow. It feels icy against his skin but somehow comforting. He suddenly feels too tired to respond defensively.
“Mm,” he murmurs, closing his eyes.
“You’re running a fever,” states Hannibal, withdrawing his hand. “Have you taken anything?”
“No.”
“You should get some rest.”
Opening his eyes, Will nods tiredly and turns to go.

Lying in his bed, watching the ceiling, he listens to the footsteps climbing the stairs. When they begin to travel across the landing towards him, he slowly pulls himself up against the pillows. The bedroom door is open and he can see Hannibal approaching with a glass tumbler and a large jug of water. Stepping into the room, he comes to Will’s side of the bed and puts the glass down on the bedside table.
“Take these,” he says, placing two white pills on the table. “They should help to reduce your fever.” He fills the tumbler with water from the jug before setting it down on the table. Will picks up the pills and takes the glass handed to him. Swallowing them, he takes a large gulp of water before lowering the glass into his lap with a shudder.
“How do you feel?” asks Hannibal.
“Cold,” Will mutters, sinking back down against the bed. “Hot,” he sighs quietly. He looks up at Hannibal.
“How’s your shoulder?”
Hannibal looks at him. His expression relaxed.
“Improving.”
“Painful?”
“Occasionally.”
Will pauses.
“Any other injuries?”
“No.”
Will falls quiet.
“Did you leave them with injuries?” he finally asks.
A pause as Hannibal looks down at him.
“No,” he answers. Will licks his lips and opens his mouth as though to speak, but Hannibal has turned to walk out of the room.
“Get some rest, Will,” he says on his way out.

He wakes in the middle of the night to the sound of fear and realises how much he has missed it. Climbing out of bed, he walks out of his room and across the landing to the other's open doorway. He can't see Will in the dark, but he can hear his panicked breaths. Following them to his bedside, Hannibal sits on the edge and leans down with a tilt to his head to listen carefully. The shallow and erratic pants blowing against his cheek tell him Will is oblivious to his presence. He presses his hand to his brow. It is burning hot and slick with sweat. Pulling back the covers, he starts to remove Will's tee. The body beneath his hands continues to shudder convulsively, but there is still no indication his touch has been registered. He wraps his left hand around the man's throat. No response. Slowly, he tightens his grip, listening to his breath growing taut. He becomes aware of a scent that grows stronger the more he begins to strangle the other in earnest. Knows, without taking his hand off his throat, that another part of Will is throbbing hard in the dark.

He stands with his hands in the pockets of his coat, watching the dogs. It had snowed overnight and now the branches of the trees above him have started to drip in the morning sun. A bird lands close to his feet and pecks at the ground. Several others are singing in the trees around him. He is glad the dogs are amusing themselves in the snow. He never was one for playing with animals.
"Welcome home," says a voice from behind. Hannibal smiles without looking in its direction.
"Thank you," he replies. "I didn't hear you coming. I'm impressed."
"Where is Melissa?"
"I think you know."
A pause.
"Did you eat her?" asks the voice, attempting to remain monotonous but betraying a hint of emotion. Anxiety.

Hannibal tilts his head and turns around to face Richard. The man bears an uncanny resemblance to Will with his black curls and glassy green stare. Hannibal is curious as to whether the pallor of his face is genetic or a result of stress and overworking. Again, the similarity to Will is notable. There is a hunting knife clasped in his right hand.
"I did," he answers simply, observing the whitening of knuckles around the handle of the knife. "She was delicious," he adds, looking directly at Richard.

Sidestepping the slashing motion of the knife, he waits for an opening. His opponent is fast on his feet and determined enough to remain focused even with the sound of approaching dogs. Backing from another slash, he attempts to lasso Richard's arm with the dog leash, but misses. The dogs run between them, their barks loud and aggressive. One of them goes for Richard. He dodges the large, lumbering body as it leaps at him, and sinks his knife into its side. The dog whimpers when he pulls it out, a jet of blood hitting the white and brown sludge of the ground. Distracted by its distress, the other dog goes to its side, and Richard finds the space to lunge again at Hannibal. He tries to evade the attack, but takes a hit in the forearm he lifts to shield his face. Heat begins to run in the sleeve of his coat and drip from the torn fabric. He successfully throws the leash over Richard's forearm, but as he pulls it taut, the other cuts himself free with the sharp edge of the knife. Richard throws himself at Hannibal, who collides backwards into the trunk of a tree. Dislodged from the branches, snow falls onto them from above, but neither notices as they struggle for dominance, Hannibal catching at the arms which push and pin him against the tree. The knife is close to his throat.

"I'm curious who will taste better," he grunts tauntingly through his teeth, and Richard jerks out of his grip. He comes at him with renewed force, and Hannibal waits before trapping his arm last minute. He smacks it repeatedly against the trunk, but Richard won't let go of the knife. It is uncouth, but Hannibal resorts to thrusting his knee up into the other's groin. The knife drops and Hannibal tackles Richard to the ground, catching his head in an arm lock. The struggle continues, but Richard does not relent. Hannibal sees the rock. To reach it, he releases Richard, who drags himself towards his knife. A dog leaps on him. Richard rolls over onto his back and lets the animal snap at his hand so he can

run the blade through its thick throat. The dog crumples on top of him, trapping him against the cold floor. Realising his mistake, he tries to pull himself free. He is close to escaping when Hannibal looms into view. He stares up as the large rock is lifted into the air and brought down upon his head.

Opening the front door, he drags Richard into the house, followed by one of the dogs. Leaving his unconscious body on the kitchen floor, Hannibal returns to close the door and walks back into the kitchen, past Richard, to the cupboard beneath the sink where the rope is kept. He feels the dog collapsing against his legs, and looks down to see the blood beginning to pool at his feet. The animal is trembling pitifully. Hannibal crouches down to run his hand over its dark body, searching for the wound. He can feel the thundering heart beat against his palm. He does not notice Richard approaching him from behind with the wine bottle.

First Taste

Slowly he opens his eyes to the sounds of struggle. In his half delirious state, he drags himself out of bed and onto the landing where the sounds are louder. He hears Hannibal's voice and staggers down the stairs. Reaching the bottom, he looks across and sees Hannibal lying on the floor of the kitchen. Someone is straddling him, wearing the same dark coat he had chased through the forest that early morning.

The broken bottle is brought close to his throat. Hannibal tightens his grip on Richard's arms as he bears down harder on him, both of them trembling faintly from their exertion. Suddenly, Will appears behind Richard, locking his arms around the other's neck. As Will tries to pull him back, Hannibal pushes off the floor and tries to overpower Richard and his hold on the bottle. Gradually, combined with Will's efforts, Hannibal manages to push up onto his knees and from this advantageous position, begins to redirect Richard's hand. Unable to free himself from Will's choking arms, Richard struggles to stop the jagged glass turning back on him. Wild green eyes continue to stare at Hannibal until they're abruptly covered over by Will's arms. With the pressure suddenly gone from around his neck, he inhales sharply, and Hannibal uses the force of both his hands to push the glass into Richard's throat. Will keeps hold of Richard's head as Hannibal forces the glass in. A growl of pain escapes past Richard's gritted teeth. Hannibal lets go with one hand momentarily to grab Will's arm while Richard struggles anew to push back against him.

Shaking all over as he continues to hold Richard against himself, Will breathes heavily as he registers Hannibal's touch on his arm. He slackens his hold around the other's skull to let the touch guide his arm down until Hannibal's hand is covering his own. Richard manages to use both his hands to push against Hannibal's and force the glass back and out of his skin. Hannibal looks at Will. He presses Will's hand onto the bottle over Richard's fingers. Will looks back at Hannibal. He pushes down at the same time. It's harder than wielding a blade. Richard groans in pain as the glass sinks back into his neck. The sound he makes turns gradually into a choked gurgling as between them they drag the glass across his throat.

They sit on the floor as Richard lies between them, drowning in his own blood. Will stares ahead, eyes lidded. Hannibal watches the dog lying at the foot of the sink. Its body is barely moving with each weak breath.

"He's dying," says Hannibal quietly. Will doesn't respond. Perhaps he doesn't realise he is talking about the dog. Even though he is staring straight at it. Slowly, Hannibal stands up.

Will feels a hand stroking through his hair. The fingers press warmly against his scalp. Unconsciously, he lets out the breath he has been holding in his chest. A calm descends on him, as heavy as sleep. The hand leaves, and he turns his face towards the sound of Hannibal's footsteps leaving the kitchen. "Where are you going?" Will asks, suddenly anxious, but when he twists around to watch, he is relieved to see Hannibal climbing hurriedly up the stairs.

Will has lost count of how long he has been pressing the gauze against the wound. Twice now, his mind had gone blank. He hears Hannibal coming back over from dealing with Richard's body.
"Has it stopped?" he asks, and Will watches the pinprick of red in the thick wad under his hand. It doesn't grow any bigger.
"Yes."
A pause.
"How are you feeling?" Hannibal asks.

Will is slow to reply.
“I’m fine. I can do this,” he utters, rubbing his eyes with his free hand. “Your head is bleeding.”
Hannibal watches down at Will for a moment. A feeling snakes itself traitorously into his being. He catches it before it can go any further.
“I’ll be in the bathroom.”

It doesn’t take long to clean and bandage up the wound. Will tries hiding an aspirin in a treat, but the dog is too weak to eat it. He leaves it on the floor anyway, just in case. Pulling the blanket further up its body, he strokes its head one more time before standing up. There is blood all over the kitchen floor. It brings back memories that hurt. He makes Abigail’s body disappear by clasping a hand over his eyes.

Without the distraction of a house invasion or a wounded animal, Will feels the last of the adrenaline leaching out of his body and leaving him to the mercy of his unrelenting fever. He hasn't stopped sweating since he woke, and is aware of drifting into a state of delirium. He walks out of the kitchen to the living room and drops down on an armchair. Leaning over on his knees, he holds his head in his hands and closes his eyes. He should be out with exhaustion, but he can't switch off.
"I can give you something,” says Hannibal’s voice from the threshold. Will’s eyes slip open to stare at the unlit fireplace in front of him.
"To help you sleep," he hears Hannibal add.
"Isn't that a bad idea?" Will utters tiredly, watching the other walk in and crouch down in front of the fireplace.
"Your choice," replies Hannibal, picking up the poker. From where he's sitting, Will can see where Hannibal has stitched up his head wound. He leans back in the chair. His skin is still pouring from the inferno, his limbs all a shiver from a frozen core. He stares at the ceiling until Hannibal's face hovers into view above him.
"Well?" he asks, just as the edges begin to grow dim. Firelight dances faintly on the ceiling behind Hannibal. Will doesn't know what reply he gives before closing his eyes.

When Will comes to him, Hannibal is with the dog. Crouched down in front of the animal, he continues to stroke its head until he senses Will stood close behind him. He feels fingers probing his hair, their tips rubbing over the new stitches. Straightening up to stand, he turns around. There is no expression on Will’s face. His eyes are vacant. He could be anywhere. He steps forward. Hannibal steps back. The edge of the sink stops him moving any further as Will comes close enough for them to feel their breaths on one another’s faces. His nostrils flare at that familiarly heady scent.

His own curiosity allows Will to reach up and run his hand into his hair again, fingers curling into the tresses and pulling tight on stitched scalp. The pain doesn’t register as vividly as the smell of him, however, and he starts to lift a hand from where it braces against the sink. Will stops it, catching his wrist. He holds it there, pinned to the sink as he starts to press down with his other hand. Wondering how far he will let this go, Hannibal lets that pressure push him into a sit. Back against the cupboards, his hand still pinned to the edge of the sink, he braces his other hand against the floor. He lets Will rub himself against his cheek through his shorts until, growing impatient, he reaches up to free him. The surprise doesn’t come at seeing the appendage, but what he suspects the other wants to do with it. At first he keeps his mouth closed to the sensation of smooth flesh nudging at his lips, even when it starts to secrete. But instinct soon makes him part his lips and bare his teeth. He catches the offending head of Will’s penis, blunt and thick, between his sharp incisors.

He uses just enough pressure to test the resistance in the turgid flesh, and notes that he enjoys this texture. Before his impulses can urge him to bite down, however, a sudden and unexpected thrust from Will's hips knocks his head back so it smacks dully against the cupboard doors. The taste that fills his palette is heady, yet he doesn't have time to contemplate the sensibilities of his taste-buds as

the girthy flesh rubs forcefully in and out of his mouth. Even with the edges of his teeth scraping faintly with each push, Will's pace continues to build.

He feels Will's hand tightening on his hair. Unable to help himself, Hannibal closes his mouth just a little. A gasp escapes from above. The pain of his teeth, however, also abruptly triggers Will's climax. Without warning, he floods the cavity of Hannibal's mouth. Likening the act to swallowing oysters, Hannibal eats Will's seed. Immediately after, Will slips out of his mouth and sinks down against Hannibal. When he feels no further movement in Will, Hannibal pushes up, supporting the other's weight.

When he comes to, his eyes slip open to a piece of paper lying on the bedside table. On it, he makes out a familiar scrawl in the lamplight.

Walking the dogs.

He looks across from the note to Hannibal. He is sat in a chair that has been pulled up to his bedside. His head is leaning against his hand. He watches Will with half closed eyes. Will has a feeling the other has been watching him like this for some time.
"How are you feeling?" he asks.
"Never felt better," Will utters tiredly. He's annoyed he still isn't better yet, but at least he's no longer blowing from hot to cold and back again. The shaking also seems to have stopped. "How did he get in?" he asks, confused.
"I brought him in," explains Hannibal, straightening up, legs crossing. "He was unconscious," he adds, hands clasping together on his lap. He glances aside thoughtfully. "Or pretending to be."
"You fought?"
"We did."
"Had he been here all this time?"
"Maybe."
Will exhales loudly.
"That would explain why I couldn't find him out there. Why did he wait?"
"He wanted me alone."
"Why?"
"Wouldn't you want revenge on the one who ate your wife?"
When Will doesn't immediately respond, Hannibal adds, "a loved one?"
Abigail returns to his mind. As does the false memory of regurgitating her ear.
"You're asking the wrong person," he utters, looking away.
"The dog is still alive," says Hannibal. "Thought you'd be happy to know."
"I assume the other one didn't make it."
"Sadly, no."
"You could have died," says Will quickly, meeting Hannibal in the eye. "If I hadn't come."
"You did," replies Hannibal simply, a corner of his mouth beginning to curl upwards before he breaks eye contact to reach over and pick up the fresh jug of water on the bedside table. "You came to my aid," he says, pouring water into the empty glass. "Like a knight in shining armour," he adds with a smile, offering him the glass.
"You're not the damsel in distress I expected," Will utters, taking the glass. His fingertips touch Hannibal's.
"But we kill dragons together," says Hannibal, letting go of the glass.
"Yes," Will quietly agrees, bringing the water to his lips and taking a sip. Hannibal is still smiling. After a while, Will smiles too.

Phone Call

In the morning, Will wakes to the smell of coffee in his room. He opens his eyes and sees Hannibal stood leaning against the doorway.
"Good morning," he says, lowering the mug in his hand and watching Will through the soft points of his hair. "How are you feeling?"
Slowly, Will pushes up against the bed into a sit, leaning back with a quiet exhale.
"Better."
"Good," replies Hannibal with a smile, and in the placating morning light coming in through the windows, his gaze looks soft, his expression genuine.
"How is the dog?" Will asks.
"He could do with replenishing his blood count," says Hannibal, taking another sip of his coffee. "By eating plenty of iron-rich foods."
Will looks at Hannibal.
"Shop bought," he states flatly, and Hannibal crinkles his face in distaste. When Will's expression does not change, he acquiesces with an intake of breath.
"As you wish," he says, draining the remainder of his coffee and turning to go.
"I want to come with you," Will calls after the other, and Hannibal turns around.
"You don't trust me with the butcher?"
"You'd butcher the butcher," Will scoffs, then breaks eye contact to climb out of the bed. "I could do with some fresh air."

Hannibal drives them to a small local farm. They have become friendly with the old couple who runs it and Hannibal prefers their meat over the butcher's counter. Sat in the car, Will takes in his surroundings. The wooden fence ringing off the field is old and neglected. It wouldn't take long to fix. From his vantage point, the farm is a nice size for two people, with plenty of space for a dog to run around. Plenty of things to mend and straighten, nail and hammer back into place. There's probably a little kitchen somewhere with shelves full of homemade preserves. Hannibal would no doubt enjoy making his own jams. Just not with fruit, he muses aloud with a small grimace, then wonders why he is even thinking about such things.

When they get back to the house, Will slips another buffered aspirin into the liver, just in case. He waits until the dog finishes eating before unravelling the bandaging to flush out the wound again. Patting the animal dry with a towel, Will applies a harmless but ill-tasting substance around the mouth of the wound, but otherwise leaves it uncovered to breathe. He sits there stroking its head and back until it falls asleep. Soon, Hannibal appears at the doorway.
"Do you feel well enough to join me outside?" he asks, hands in his pockets. Will rises to a stand, hands resting habitually on his hips.
"Where are we going?"

Will is to choose where to bury the dead dog. In the end, he decides they should put him in a spot they often look upon, so they can be reminded of his bravery. Taking their shovels to the space outside the kitchen, they start digging a hole in front of the young tree growing on its own in the middle of the grass. The earth is frozen and it takes some effort to loosen the soil.
"I'm glad you are well again," says Hannibal as he positions the edge of the shovel and stomps down on it sharply. Will does the same on the opposing side, wriggling the handle up and down before lifting up a mound of soil and depositing it to the side. "You ought to take better care of yourself," he adds, and Will takes a deep breath, drawing the cold air down into his lungs.
"Maybe," he exhales a white cloud, eyes on the dent they've made in the ground.
"You overworked yourself."

Will grunts in response, ramming his shovel deeper.
“Did you miss me that much?” asks Hannibal.
“How was your vacation?” Will asks quickly, tossing soil a touch too hard so it misses the pile.
“It was nice,” replies Hannibal, also dropping soil onto the pile before adding casually, “albeit lonesome at times.” Will can't help snorting a sharp exhale.
“Should I turn you into a violin and play a sad tune," he mutters flatly, eyes downcast as he watches the network of exposed roots and the pale body of a worm burrowing in fright.
“Percussion would suit you better,” says Hannibal nonchalantly. “Hitting, scraping, rubbing by hand, striking against another instrument.” The sound of metal slicing through soil continues, sharp and uneven.
“A rather fitting description of our sex life,” adds Hannibal. “If we had one.”
Will glances across at the other's amused expression.
"You're not cutting off my penis and feeding it to me," he snorts.
"Armin Meiwes was not a skilled chef," says Hannibal. "But he did think to use wine and garlic."
"I really don't want to know," Will replies, and the conversation gives way to the sound of digging.

Eventually Will stops, panting softly from his exertion, his breath escaping his lips in a flurry of white puffs. He pushes the edge of the woollen hat back from his eyes, licking his lips before speaking.
“Next time,” he begins to say, then hesitates, lips parted, eyes lifting to see Hannibal standing opposite him, one foot on the shovel. *Can there not be a next time? It has started to snow and the icy breeze is stirring through strands of his hair, making hooded eyes blink as they look up and across the hole at him.*
"Can you give me a warning before disappearing?" Will finally finishes asking before returning to the task at hand.
"Of course," Hannibal replies, and the sound of his shovel resuming its work is joined by Hannibal’s.

Between them, they lower the dog's large body into the grave and begin the task of filling in the hole. They work in silence, watching the black hide disappearing gradually from view, one patch of earth at a time. By the time they have finished, the garden is covered with a fine dusting of snow.
“I was thinking of going away,” Hannibal begins to say, watching the tree with his hands clasped together upon the handle of the shovel.
“Again?” Will asks with a grimace he can't quite manage to suppress.
“Yes,” answers Hannibal simply. “Would you care to join me?”
The part of Will that had wanted to crawl across the blood-stained kitchen floor towards Hannibal, suddenly takes a breath. He squints through the falling snow at the other.
“Sure,” he answers. “Why not.” He licks his lips and adds, “will we be working?”
“Maybe," says Hannibal. "Or I could eat your penis."
Will watches his expressionless face and feels his own breaking into something between a smile and a frown. He laughs uncomfortably, looking away with a shake of his head.
"No thank you," he utters, picking up his shovel and heading to the shed, glad to hear the sound of Hannibal's footsteps following after him.

Will wakes to the sound of the phone ringing. His head is pounding already from all the drinking earlier that evening. He isn’t even sure what they had been drinking to. Anything and everything, it had seemed. An unspoken celebration of survival. He had eventually passed out at the foot of Hannibal's bed which he now pushes against to stand up. Hannibal is asleep on top of the covers.

Grabbing the receiver of the phone, he pulls it to his ear and swallows drily before speaking.
“Hello?”
“Hello, Will,” says a voice, and he squeezes shut his eyes in the attempt to gather his thoughts together. “May I speak with Hannibal, please.”
He looks over at the bed to see Hannibal getting up. The lamp is still on, but Will can see a navy sky

from between a gap in the curtains.
“Bedelia?” he asks with a frown. Hannibal approaches the desk. Will watches his lidded eyes and sleep mussed hair. He hands over the receiver. Hannibal looks down at it for a moment before taking it and lifting it to his ear.
“Hello?” he says, voice low and a little scratchy around the syllables.
Will folds his arms, waiting uneasily.
“Not at all,” says Hannibal, his expression giving nothing away. A pause.
“Of course."
Another pause.
“I believe so.”
And another as Hannibal turns his eyes on Will.
"I will come now,” he says and waits for a moment before putting down the receiver with a soft click.
“Where are we going?” Will asks immediately. Hannibal looks as though he is weighing up his options.
"You don't have to-”
“Where?” interrupts Will. Hannibal looks at him.
“To get Bedelia.”

Hunt

Bedelia puts the cell phone in the palm of his outstretched hand. Dressed entirely in black, he is nondescript in the navy gloom of her living room. His face, however, hovers over her like a luminous white mask. She lifts her chin to observe him. His eyes are large and deceptively gentle looking. It is difficult to tell his age because of his heavy facial hair.
“Have we met before?” she asks curiously. He sits down on the armchair opposite from her, resting a pistol upon his thigh.
“You don’t recognise me,” he states, voice quiet. Bedelia tilts her head without answering. She does not remember his voice. Slowly he reclines in the armchair, eyes leaving her to survey the four corners of the room, and suddenly she recalls watching those same eyes in a different time. Wide and restless with the confusion of inexperience. Haunted by the desire of things he did not understand. At the time, he didn't seem so different to her other clients.
”I apologise for not remembering your name,” she says.
“I don’t expect you to,” he replies, eyes travelling back to watch her closely. “I always knew you would be of help to me.” He smiles. Bedelia smiles back.
“I recall you left before we could really begin,” she says thoughtfully, remembering his clean-shaven face now. The way it had pinched with a rage all the more beguiling for its innocence. “You were an angry young man,” she adds. He watches her without responding. She does not break eye contact.
“Has the object of your anger changed?” she asks. There is a pause.
“When they cut off its head,” he says eventually, voice soft and eyes lowering to the pistol which he strokes idly with a finger. “Two more took its place.”
Bedelia senses pain as he speaks, and suspects she knows who he is referring to.

Stepping out onto the porch, Will shuts the door behind him and sighs a white flurry into the dark. Sat on the snow, the car waits like a sleek predator, exhaling steam from the exhaust. It billows into the frigid air, distorting the angry red brake lights. Tugging up the collar of his coat, he hurries down the steps, cutting through the falling snow on his way to the car.

Will watches the wiper blades whipping back and forth as they catch and drop the snow. Glancing askance, he sees Hannibal staring at the road through lidded eyes as he drives. Turning his gaze back on the windscreen, he lets himself fall into a trance watching the silent chaos outside.
“The Chinese have a proverb involving the praying mantis,” says Hannibal.
“It stalks the cicada, unaware of the sparrow behind,” says Will. “Are we the sparrow or the mantis?”
“I guess we shall find out.”
Will can’t suppress the question any longer.
“Were you with Bedelia after you left?”
“Yes.”
“And they know you went to see her,” Will utters with a frown. “They were following you?”
A pause.
“Following Richard and Melissa,” he corrects himself as he looks at Hannibal who continues to watch the road ahead.
“And Richard had been following you,” he says.
“He was angry I ate his girlfriend,” says Hannibal.
“And now someone’s angry we killed Richard?” asks Will.
“You can ask them yourself,” says Hannibal. “We’re almost there.”

The frozen ground is hard beneath their feet. If not for the moonlight, they would struggle to see where they are going. Will lowers his chin further, using the coat collar to shield his cheeks from the biting wind. As they walk deeper into the forest, the wind picks up, masking the whistle of a speeding

missile. He cries out in surprise at the explosion of pain in his right leg.
“Shit,” he grunts through gritted teeth as Hannibal grabs his left arm to steady him. Looking down, he sees a narrow black shaft with coloured fletching protruding from his thigh. The head of the arrow has torn through the material of his trousers and embedded itself into muscle.
“It’s missed the femoral,” Hannibal states calmly, pushing something warm and soft into Will’s hand. His scarf. Will hurriedly begins to wind it around his thigh to make a rough bandage as Hannibal stands vigilantly in front of him. He grinds his teeth when he feels the disturbed broadhead twisting inside his leg, but straightens up despite the pain.

Someone steps out into the circular clearing from the trees. Their attire revealed by moonlight. Head to toe in black. A hunting mask obscuring the face, leaving only the eyes visible beneath the brim of a cap and the hood pulled over it. In front of trousers tucked into military boots hangs a crossbow. Will knows if a cloud moves and blocks the moonlight now, their adversary will become invisible.

“He always was an easy target,” says Hannibal lightly, tilting his head with his hands in the pockets of his coat.
“It takes away the fun,” says the shadow monotonously, their voice muffled by the mask but distinctly male.
“Where is she?” asks Will through his teeth. His leg is growing increasingly damp from the escaping blood.
“You’re standing over her.”
Will watches a gloved hand slipping into a trouser pocket. It pulls out a cell phone, the screen emitting a blueish white light that cuts through the dark and reveals the seams of the other’s garments and the brown of his eyes. A melodious ringing escapes faintly from beneath them. Nobody moves or says anything as the muffled tune continues. Then stops. And Bedelia’s voice plays through the loudspeaker.
“Hello?” she answers. “Daniel?” Her voice is tired. They continue to stare at each other across the forest floor. The gloved hand ends the call and slips the phone back out of sight.
“Do you enjoy hunting, Daniel?” Hannibal asks, as though they are in a session. Any sense of urgency diminished by his hypnotic accent. Moonlight reflects off the point of a broadhead sat between the jaws of the riser. Will wonders if he can reach for, draw, and fire his pistol before the other looses another bolt. He assumes Hannibal has his own firearm, but cannot presume he will use it.
“Yes.”
“What do you enjoy hunting?”
“The stag.”
Daniel lifts the crossbow, training it first at Hannibal, then at Will.
“I will make you watch as I string him up and empty him of his organs,” he says. Will smiles twitchingly despite his burning thigh.
“You have to catch him first,” he utters tauntingly.

He sees Hannibal dart for cover somewhere in his peripheral vision. Daniel runs after him.
“Run, little stag,” he mutters to Will on passing, and he pulls out his pistol and aims, but the other has already disappeared into the dense network of trees. He turns his eyes back to the ground.

Stood behind the trunk of a tree, he waits for Daniel to stalk past before ambushing him. Knives are drawn, their blades flashing the growing daylight. Daniel lands first blow as he drives his knife into Hannibal’s shoulder, aggravating the old wound. He grunts as Daniel twists the blade before the other shoves him hard enough to send him stumbling backwards off the steep slope.

Listening closely, Daniel times the steps required to reload the crossbow against the steps taken by Hannibal to reach the bottom of the slope. Weapon cocked and ready, he stands at the edge of the drop, surveying the snow-covered foliage. Slowly, he begins to make his descent.

Will's fingers have grown numb, but he does not stop. The phantom breath of the great black stag blows against the back of his neck as he continues to dig. His eyes are trained on the growing cavity created by his hands and the heavy hooves dragging pointedly at the edge of the hole. Down on all fours, he pants as he works, ignoring the throbbing of his thigh.
"Where's the dog when you need him?" he utters under his breath.

Hiding in the tree, his slightest movement disturbs enough snow to make Daniel look up. Dropping onto his back, Hannibal catches his neck in the crook of his arm and stabs his knife into the other's gloved hand. A muffled groan of pain escapes through the hunting mask as they hit the snow and Hannibal wrestles the crossbow from his grasp. Once released, Daniel begins to flee. Taking a grounding step back, Hannibal lifts the crossbow, training it on the running figure. He pulls the trigger and the arrow spins through the air. It pierces Daniel's leg from behind, forcing another muffled cry through the mask. Propping the crossbow on the ground, he sticks his foot in the stirrup to reload.
"Rather cumbersome, don't you think?" he says, looking up when he has finished reloading to see a trail of blood dotting the snow.

Catching up with Daniel, Hannibal fires the crossbow and the second bolt catches the other's heel, sending him stumbling over onto his hands and knees. With long and steady strides, Hannibal approaches Daniel's prone figure. Locking his hooded head in the crook of his arm, he grasps the shaft protruding from the back of Daniel's thigh and twists as the other had done with the knife in his shoulder. The man struggles against his grip, growling in pain as Hannibal screws the broadhead deeper into his leg, shredding muscle and tendon.
"Is this how you torment your animals?" asks Hannibal. "Does it excite you to watch them-"
He holds on to the shaft with both hands.
"-suffer?" he finishes saying while thrusting the broadhead straight through the limb.

Groaning through gritted teeth, Daniel's entire body stiffens from shock as Hannibal presses all his weight onto the bolt, driving the broadhead into the earth.
"I called the police," the man grunts, voice taut with pain.
Hannibal watches gloved fingers snatch down the mask covering his nose and mouth.
"The casket will fire a bolt when opened," he rasps, looking up at Hannibal with a twitching curl to the corner of his mouth. "He'll die."

Daniel whips out the knife Hannibal had stabbed his hand with and, using both hands, drives it deep through Hannibal's shoe. As he loosens his grip on Daniel to grab the knife, the other grabs the bolt pinning his leg to the ground. Both pull forcefully to free themselves before hurrying through the falling snow in opposing directions.

"Stop," his voice shouts echoingly, and Will turns his face in its direction to find Hannibal running towards him, snow in his hair and on his coat that is red at the shoulder.
"It will loose a bolt if opened," Hannibal pants as he stops at Will's side to stare at the pale wood of the unearthed lid. "It must be opened from below," he adds, getting down on his knees to begin digging with his hands.
"Did he escape?" Will asks while doing the same.
"We need to leave," says Hannibal. "He called the police."
"How long before they get here?"
"Not sure, but we need to work fast."
Between them they uncover the rest of the plywood casket. It is early morning and shrill birdsong reverberates around the forest. They use their knives to pry the walls from the base of the coffin.
"What if he's still here," grunts Will, getting into position to lift. "Waiting to shoot us in the back?"
"Takes away the fun," says Hannibal, moving to the opposite end. Nudging their toes into the gaps created at either end of the box, they plant their feet firm and carefully lift the sides. Bedelia is

gradually revealed, lying on the wood clad in a silver slip. Her body is bound by rope and her skin is pale. Her eyes are closed. There is no bolt-firing mechanism. Exchanging a glance with Hannibal, Will draws his pistol and stands guard as Hannibal removes his coat to drag over Bedelia. He picks her up and they quickly make their way out of the forest. They can't be sure if Daniel had also lied about calling the police.

"I could do with a drink," sighs Will.

"Me too," says Hannibal, and Will looks down at Bedelia in his arms.

"Me three," he mutters.

Room Mate

Hannibal is kneeling at Will's feet as he sits on the edge of the bed. As those hands unravel the scarf wrapped around his thigh, Will grits his teeth when he sees one closing around the shaft of the protruding bolt.
"When I count to one," says Hannibal, meeting his eye, and Will nods, drawing in a breath. The thick wad of gauze ready in his hand.
"One," says Hannibal, pulling out the broadhead. The curse exploding from Will's lips is stifled as he presses them together and clenches his jaw. He feels the pile of gauze being snatched from his hand before it is pressed over the welling wound. Hannibal's hands are painfully tight around his thigh, which begins to throb under the hard press of his fingers.
"Once it has stabilised, we will search for any foreign objects that may have entered the flesh," states Hannibal, unperturbed by his glare.
"Did he escape in one piece?" asks Will.
"A thigh for a thigh," offers Hannibal, looking up. "I shot him like he shot you."
Will grunts in approval.
"I skewered him to the ground with the bolt," Hannibal continues to say.
"Did he make a good kebab?" Will mutters drily.
"He did," says Hannibal with a smile.
"New wound?" says Will, looking at the other's shoulder. There is a dark stain where something had entered and torn the fabric of his shirt.
"An old one."
"He knew about it?"
"Possibly."
"I can manage," he utters, putting his hands over Hannibal's, ready to take over and maintain the pressure. "How is she?"
"Tougher than both of us put together," says Hannibal, and Will can't help lofting his eyebrows.
"Is that why you haven't eaten her yet?" he scoffs. Hannibal looks at Will, the small smile at the corner of his mouth pulling up a little more.
"She may require tenderising," he says lightly. "With your help."
Will pauses, keeping a straight face despite the sharp stab of sexual curiosity. Hannibal watches him amusedly.
"No thanks," he utters.

Having removed his trousers, Will uses a tweezer to remove tiny pieces of fabric from the wound in his thigh.
"Bedelia will be staying with us indefinitely."
At the sound of his voice, Will looks up to see Hannibal standing shirtless at the threshold. The wound in his shoulder is messy. Its uneven edges evidence that whatever went in had twisted in the flesh.
"Until it's safe," he adds.
"Is it?" says Will drily, and Hannibal tilts his head.
"Is that a threat?" he asks calmly. Will doesn't reply. Hannibal smiles, eyes drawing to a half close as he turns in the direction of the bathroom. Before he walks off, he gives Will one more look from the corner of his eye.
"Your fear has an appealing scent."
Will also watches Hannibal from the corner of his eye.
"I'm not afraid," he says lowly. Hannibal hums as he looks up thoughtfully.
"How do you feel about sharing your room while Bedelia resides with us?"

“Sharing.”
“You and I.”
Will feigns indifference by pulling a casual expression.
“You can make sure we don’t get murdered in our sleep,” says Hannibal, and he opens his mouth to retort, but the man walks off.

The house is quiet. In the living room, he sits beside the dog on the floor, stroking its head as he stares into the fireplace. It is early evening and Bedelia has not left Hannibal’s room. The other had given her something to help her sleep before retiring to Will’s room and climbing into bed to rest. It would have been petty to protest the arrangement, he supposes. They don’t have another spare bed. Not even a settee.

When they first took up residence here, they had established an unspoken rule of respecting one another’s privacy. In practice, Hannibal keeps an open door policy, and doesn’t regard Will’s trespasses into his room as such. He was just starting to get used to the setup.

“Are you hungry?” asks a voice. Will looks over to the doorway. Instead of being wrapped in his customary dressing gown, Hannibal is stood in pyjama pants and a sweater. His hair falling soft across his lidded eyes.
“Starving.”
“What would you like to eat?”
“Something neanderthal,” says Will, getting up onto his feet. “Do we have steak?”
“We have too much steak,” replies Hannibal, and Will paces over to him, hands on his hips.
“I would prefer something from the,” Will mutters, holding Hannibal’s gaze and inclining his head a little towards the other, “bovine category.”
“Let’s find you a nice fillet,” says Hannibal with a polite smile.
“I’ll find me a nice fillet,” corrects Will, stepping past Hannibal into the hallway.

It’s just paranoia, Will tells himself. He’s sure the beef is kept in the frozen section of the fridge, and Hannibal’s other meats in the stand alone freezer in the pantry. That’s what they had agreed, if he remembers correctly. He reaches into the deep tray packed tight with meat and picks up what could be a beef steak. Should be. Closing the fridge, he takes the ziplocked meat over to the chopping board. The oil is already hot in the pan. He opens the bag and removes the meat from its vacuum seal. He is aware of Hannibal watching him from behind and can’t help glancing back over his shoulder.
“Good choice,” says Hannibal, taking a sip of his coffee. Will does not trust that shrewd smile.
“Aren’t you eating?” he asks.
“I shall be,” replies Hannibal. “I enjoy watching.”
“You’re not going to judge me for cooking it from frozen?” Will mutters, turning back to face the pan.
“On the contrary, science has proven it retains the quality of the meat more effectively.”
Will hums.
“There’ll be subtle differences in outcome, of course, depending on the type of meat,” Hannibal adds.
“But overall, it should taste pleasant.”
“If this is human, you’d best tell me now,” he says, raising an eyebrow at the other.
“Perhaps you’ll be able to tell the difference.”
Despite the unhelpful comment, Will places the frozen steak in the oil and plays idly with the tongs in his hand as he watches the meat beginning to sear.
“Are you making her something?” he asks.
“Yes,” answers Hannibal. “I’ll take something up.”
“Like what?”
“Sausage.”
Will scoffs, keeping his back to the other.

“You have a better suggestion?”
“Give her what you want,” he grunts.

He had watched Hannibal cook the omelette, fold it, and lay it carefully on a plate, before finishing it off with a handful of spinach. While watching the other, Will had poured the glass of orange juice as instructed. As far as he knows, Bedelia is uninjured. Not that this would stop Hannibal from presenting only the best for an old *friend.*

Standing at the threshold of his room, Will watches Hannibal carry the tray in. As the door closes, he hears Hannibal’s quiet greeting and remembers being visited in hospital when the man had brought food and they had sat down to eat together. It was a long time ago now, but he won’t forget the simplicity of that memory. The two of them eating and discussing. He hadn’t known then. That he was being lied to. A part of him was just enjoying the other’s company. And they became friends.

He moves away from the doorway and stands facing the bed. He doesn’t know how this is going to work. Rather, he hasn’t imagined sharing a bed with the other before, and finds it difficult to see it now. Does Hannibal have a preference for which side he sleeps on? Does he move around in his sleep? What if he crosses over onto Will’s side? He has to be a light sleeper. What if Will opens his eyes in the middle of the night to find Hannibal staring at him?

He hears footsteps crossing the landing and entering the room.
“How is she?” asks Will, glancing aside at Hannibal.
“A little drowsy,” he answers, standing there at Will’s side, studying the bed. “But she’ll be good as new in the morning.”
Will turns away from the bed, as though to detract attention from the inevitable.
“I’m going to have a shower,” he utters, dragging a hand through his hair and avoiding looking at the other as he walks past.

In his haste to leave the room, he forgot to take clean clothes with him into the bathroom. Towel wrapped around his waist, he makes his way back to the bedroom, glancing at Hannibal’s door on passing. When he approaches the open doorway and the glow of lamplight, he sees the other lying on his side under the covers, to the right of the bed, facing in. His black eyes swivel onto him.
“Would you mind if we left the door open?” he asks. Will paces over to Hannibal’s side and opens the top drawer of the bedside table.
“No,” he utters, taking out the pistol and closing the drawer before walking round to his allotted side. As he pushes it under his pillow, Hannibal leans up on an arm, his head resting against his hand.
“Is that necessary?” he murmurs, eyes flicking up to meet Will’s, and suddenly the sight of the man lying in his bed makes all the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end.
“It will help me sleep,” he says woodenly, eyes falling on the gauze at Hannibal’s shoulder before straying to the threshold.
“Are you so convinced she will try to kill us?” he asks and Will looks back down to see dark eyes travelling up his body before settling on his face.
“Are you so convinced she won’t?” he retorts, crossing over to the chest of drawers pushed up against the wall.
“I like to think she won’t,” he hears the other say as he pulls open a drawer and takes out a pair of shorts. Unravelling the towel, he gives his body a brisk pat down before pulling on the underwear. They feel a very flimsy barrier for getting into bed with the man.
“Though I sense a degree of resentment for her becoming embroiled in our affairs,” Hannibal continues to say. Will drags a tee over his head and down his body, feeling fractionally more comfortable as he picks up the towel and rubs at his damp hair.
“It’s not like she hasn’t got her hands dirty before,” he mutters, turning to see the other lying with his back to him still. The Verger brand hidden beneath the edge of the cover. Continuing to rub his hair,

Will glances at their bedside tables. Stalling.
“I’m getting some water,” he says. “Do you want some?”

When Will returns with the water, Hannibal has fallen asleep. He puts a glass down on his bedside table before walking round to his own side of the bed. Sitting down with his back to the other, he takes a couple of deep gulps before lowering the glass. Hesitantly, he turns his head and looks back at Hannibal from the corners of his eyes. Facing Will, he lies in repose with his head half sunk into the pillow looking deceptively normal. Deceptively harmless with his right arm tucked under the pillow. Will presumes the man feels no need to protect himself and cannot help scoffing as he sets the glass down on the table and lifts the cover before sliding down into bed. He pauses the once, watching that sleeping face for signs of disturbance, before continuing to stretch his legs out, testing the walls of his imaginary barrier – checking his elbow doesn’t cross the boundary of Hannibal’s side of the bed when he clasps his hands together over his stomach. Exhaling through the nose, he lets his head sink into the pillow as he stares at the ceiling. Eventually, his eyes travel to the man lying beside him. Hannibal’s mouth has fallen open ever so slightly. His lips parted just enough to allow his silent breaths to pass. Will drifts off staring at them and dreams he is lying in bed receiving oral sex beneath the covers. When he looks down, it’s sometimes Sophia, sometimes Melissa. When he’s close, he looks down again and sees Hannibal with his mouth wrapped around him and blood smearing the lower half of his face.

He wakes with a violent gasp and has to muster all of his control not to toss aside the cover and check he isn’t bleeding out from a raw stump. His clothes are sticking to him with sweat. His shorts feel painfully tight. He drags an arm over his eyes, chest still heaving.
“Blood?” murmurs a sleep-roughened voice beside him.
Will swallows.
“Yeah,” he answers thickly.
“Who was it this time?”
“God,” Will exhales distractedly, lowering his arm and running his hands over his face.
“You saw God?”
A pause as the image of Hannibal from the dream flashes across his mind, and he drags his hands down his face before dropping them at his sides. From the corners of his eyes, he looks for Hannibal in the dark. Just about finds the other's half closed eyes in the dim.
"Have you been awake the whole time?" he asks lowly.
"Your smell is overpowering," Hannibal murmurs, and Will hears him rolling over to face the other way.
“I sweat a lot in my sleep...”
“I was referring to your arousal.”
Pause.
“Just pretend I’m not here,” says Hannibal, and Will rolls onto his side, facing away.
“Yeah...I don’t think so,” he mutters, tugging at the front of his shorts to ease some of the pressure.

Game

In the morning, Will wakes up alone after managing to drop off at some point in the early hours. He gets out of bed, taking the gun from under his pillow. He can see from the threshold that the door to Hannibal's room is open. He walks towards it, gun poised.
"Good morning, Will."
He stops and looks down to see Hannibal stood at the foot of the stairs, putting on a coat.
"Where are you going?" he asks, then glances through the doorway of Hannibal's room.
"Bedelia is in the living room," says Hannibal, drawing Will's eyes back on himself. "I'm going out for supplies."
"Give me a minute," he says, beginning to turn back towards his room.
"Stay here, Will."
He stops and watches down at the other draping a different scarf over the back of his neck with gloved hands. "Rest," Hannibal continues to say, and when Will gives him a disconcerted look, he adds, "I won't be long."
Will looks askance, raking a hand through his hair in thought. The gun still grasped in his other hand.
"Do you need," he begins to say, meeting Hannibal's gaze. That curious expression again with the tilt to the head. Knowing the other would object, Will climbs down the stairs, his thigh throbbing hard with each step. When he reaches the bottom, he watches past Hannibal's shoulder whilst unbuttoning his coat to push the pistol into an inside pocket.
"Are you looking after me, Will?"
Hannibal's voice is low and quiet. Amused. Will turns his eyes onto Hannibal's face. His hand is still in his coat.
"Like I said," says Will, voice also low and quiet. "It's more convenient."
Hannibal smiles, eyes lidded.
"Are you going to kiss me now, Will, and wish me a good day at work?"
Will removes his hand from Hannibal's coat and folds his arms as the other buttons back up.
"Ask your fake wife."

He needs to check on the dog, but Bedelia is in the living room. Her presence hasn't disturbed it. She always did hide her fangs well, Will thinks to himself. Straightening his already straight back, he steps through the threshold.
"Hello, Will."
Will finds her sat in his armchair. Rather, the armchair he's accustomed to sitting in. Maybe it's later into the morning than he realised, but she already looks immaculate, with her makeup and tumbling blond hair all in the right place. She is wearing Hannibal's dressing gown and looking very much at home with a cup of coffee resting on a saucer in her lap.
"Bedelia," he utters in return. He feels her eyes giving his body a quick once-over and immediately feels underdressed.
"You are looking a little worse for wear," she states, head tilting, eyes lifting to his. Will feels his eyebrows lofting.
"Shame the same can't be said about you," he replies. Bedelia smiles. Will continues walking over to the dog. She doesn't say anything else, but Will feels her eyes on his back as he squats down by the animal. Grateful for his strokes, the dog thumps his thin tail. The knife wound is already starting to look better. Its appetite should have returned by now. Straightening up, Will turns to go. Passing in front of the unlit fireplace, he glances at Bedelia who lifts the coffee to her lips, her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the space in front of her.

Will returns with a bowl of dog food and a bowl of water. He places them near the dog and stands there watching down at the animal as it moves enough to eat and drink, his hands on his hips.

"What made you change your mind?" Bedelia asks. Will presumes she means choosing to live following the fall. Refusing to let anyone, let alone Bedelia, dictate his actions in his own house - yes, *his own house* - Will maintains eye contact as he steps back and sits himself down in Hannibal's chair. Rather, the chair Hannibal is accustomed to sitting in.
"I didn't," he answers. Voice low and quietly confident. Spearing her from the corners of his eyes. Seemingly immune to his glare, Bedelia continues to regard him with mild amusement, giving nothing away as to what she makes of his response. Will turns his face to watch the dog. Neither of them say anything further, and left to his own thoughts, a series of possible outcomes begin playing through his mind, all of them involving a broadhead spinning through the air and impaling an area of the body. Sometimes there's more than one bolt. Most times, Hannibal can't reach inside his coat fast enough. It's unplesasant speculating on the notion of what stranger would come across his punctured body and where. A car park, driver door still open, perhaps. Or the roadside where the car had swerved and crashed. Or, as Daniel had promised on that night in the forest: strung up and emptied of his organs. The thought of anyone else discovering Hannibal's body before him makes him feel sick to the stomach. What if this time he manages to catch Hannibal, he thinks with a terrible tightness beginning in his chest, as though he can't breathe.

He doesn't know how long they have been sitting in the living room, each privy to none but their own thoughts. And he doesn't know whose ears prick up first at the sound of the car pulling in, his or the dog's. But he stays in the chair, hands curled over the ends of the armrests. He doesn't move even when he hears the front door opening and the other's approaching footsteps. Not in front of Bedelia. When Hannibal walks into the room, arms laden with two large brown paper bags, he regards them with a look of mild surprise.
"Did I miss something?" he asks, amused.
"Riveting conversation," answers Bedelia, and the two of them exchange shrewd smiles, the sight of which makes Will's skin crawl despite being relieved to see him unharmed.
"What a shame," says Hannibal casually, stepping over to offer Bedelia one of the bags. She looks up at him as she receives it with a rustling of the brown paper. Curiosity makes Will get up from the armchair and step closer to Hannibal as though to speak to him in confidence - even with her there. Arms folding, he regards Hannibal with a serious expression.
"Any sign of him?" he asks.
"No," replies Hannibal. "I presume he is taking time out to lick his wounds like the rest of us."
Will hums, glancing down into the bag Bedelia is holding. He spots clothing. Dark red in colour.
"Would either of you care for breakfast?" Hannibal asks, turning to walk out of the living room. Will begins to follow after him.
"For you," says Hannibal, throwing something over his shoulder. Will catches what feels like a hard sphere. Hannibal continues walking towards the kitchen and leaves him standing in the hallway, looking down at a pomegranate in his hands. He hears Bedelia walking towards him, the bag rustling in her arms. She stops next to him.
“Bluebeard’s wife or the bride of Hades?" she murmurs thoughtfully. He drops his gaze into her bag. Then he looks up, meeting her in the eyes. She adds, voice smooth and provocative, a sculpted eyebrow peaking curiously, "was Persephone tricked, or did she knowingly eat the seeds?”
Bedelia smiles. Will doesn't rise to the bait. He waits for her to continue walking towards the kitchen before following after, imagining her still bound and trapped inside the wooden coffin. A bolt pointing in.

The hours that followed turned out to be uneventful, with no further signs of Daniel - for the time being. Following a relatively civil dinner and a shower, Will wanders into the kitchen to find Bedelia and Hannibal engaged in a game of sorts. Wearing a sleeping mask, she is sat at the breakfast bar in her soft, dark red blouse and fitted black skirt. The flesh coloured stockings given away by her toes. All sophistication returned to the defenceless figure Hannibal had carried through the forest. The image of her as a helpless female as quickly discarded and replaced as a snake shedding its skin.

Hannibal is stood at the kitchen unit across the small surface of the breakfast bar. He is wearing a dark denim shirt with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows, his unlacquered hair soft and falling across his eyes to one side. His right arm is outstretched towards Bedelia, the sprig of some herb held before her nose. Will catches Hannibal's eye briefly before the other returns his attention to Bedelia.
"What can you smell?" he asks.
“Animal,” she answers. "Of the domesticated variety.”
Will folds his arms, glancing at Hannibal.
"To which do you refer?" asks Hannibal, bringing the sprig of herbs to his face and twiddling it between his fingers as he pretends to study it. "We have two of those in this house."
"Yes," drawls Will lowly, stepping towards them. "With all these *beasts about, you might be in for a dirty protest."*
As Bedelia removes the blindfold, he exchanges glances with Hannibal, who smiles behind the sprig he brushes idly against his lips.
"That's disgusting," Hannibal murmurs quietly, almost seductively, lip still curled.
“They say death is a scent that cannot be masked nor washed away,” states Bedelia, stretching her arms and leaning her head down towards one shoulder then the other. "Perhaps they also meant the scent of dog," she adds, finishing her stretch and slipping elegantly off the barstool. They watch her walk out of the kitchen.
"What was that?" Will asks, arms still folded as he watches the direction in which Bedelia left.
“I used to test Abigail’s sense of smell in a similar manner,” explains Hannibal, watching the sprig pinched between his fingers again. "I once told her we have a basic affinity for our family which allows us to detect each other from smell alone.” Will watches Hannibal. Sees the amusement has disappeared from his face. Black eyes downcast and pensive. The sight of the other like this pulls at the invisible stitching between them, and Will looks away as he begins to feel the old guilt and regret flooding back into him. Swallowing down the hurt, Will climbs onto the barstool and picks up the sleeping mask. He slips it over his head, pulls the darkness over his eyes. Rests his hands on his thighs.
"I'm ready," he says quietly.

There is no denying that such a sight brings pleasure to Hannibal. In a different time, he would have ached with anticipation, waiting with bated breath for cold realisation to slip like a noose around that neck before pulling taut to choke a sob of fear and despair out of those taunting lips. He would have revelled in the other’s pain and terror upon lifting the blindfold to discover the head of Abigail Hobbs presented to him on a silver platter. It would still bring him pleasure to do it now - the thought of crushing that precarious trust being slowly built between them, to see himself reflected once more in those wide staring eyes. So hurt. So wild. So helpless to the rage of his own insatiable lust for reckoning. And yet none of this would outweigh the pain of the aftermath. The faintest possibility of reciprocation lost forever as he watches the light fading in Will’s eyes.

It is too quiet. Will starts to wonder if Hannibal has left the kitchen when he hears the sound of a knife splitting a hard rind. The crack of that rind being forced apart. He catches the sharp, acidic notes in the air and recognises the fruit. He is about to say its name when he feels something touch his lips. Allowing them to be coaxed open, Will receives it on his tongue. It is small, and he pushes it around inside his mouth, testing its shape and size. He crushes it between his teeth and is greeted with a burst of sourness. A pomegranate seed. Swallowing, he parts his lips to speak, and feels a finger entering his mouth, pushing in another seed. He holds his jaw still, unable to chew with the digit still inside. He tastes Hannibal's skin and discovers something metallic and unmistakable. He sucks instinctively on the finger and swallows the other's blood. He feels the finger pull slowly out of his mouth, and when it's gone, he reaches up to pull the sleeping mask down. Hannibal is inspecting his finger. The knife on the unit in front of him is tinted with pomegranate juice and what must be Hannibal's blood. Will licks his lips and swallows before speaking.
"You changed the game," he says quietly, and black eyes meet his gaze. Thin lips parting to receive

the bleeding digit and suck away the blood. Hannibal drags his lips up and off his finger.
"So I have," he murmurs, eyes lidded, lashes low.

During the middle of the night, Hannibal stirs, drawing Will's attention. Will hasn't been able to drop off, haunted as he is by thoughts of Bedelia or Daniel killing them in their sleep. He'd been lying there on his back, hands clasped together over his stomach, when he heard and felt Hannibal rolling over onto his other side. Will's eyes move from the ceiling in the dark, down to where he assumes is the back of Hannibal's head.
"Can't sleep?" Will utters quietly.
"What would you suggest?" murmurs Hannibal.
"I don't know," he drawls lowly. "Drink, drugs." He pauses, gazing back up at the ceiling. "Sex."
Hannibal makes a sleepy sound of approval.
“Do you long for sexual intercourse with a woman, Will?" Hannibal asks. Will continues watching the ceiling.
"Do you?"
"I find pleasure in many ways," answers Hannibal. "You shouldn't hold back, Will. It's not healthy to suppress one's sexual appetite in the long run."
Will says nothing, and eventually, he hears Hannibal shifting again in the bed.
"I'm not some animal in heat," Will grumbles.
"You smell like one."
Hannibal sounds close. He must have rolled back over to face inside.
"I'm sorry if it offends you," Will mutters, turning his face away with a sort of embarrassed defensiveness.
"On the contrary," says Hannibal lightly, "I find it quite pleasant."
Will slips a hand up over his eyes.
"Do you enjoy making others feel uncomfortable?'
"Just you."
"Thanks."
"You're welcome."

Snatching a sharp breath through his nose, Will opens his eyes, blinking away the last image from his dream. He finds himself lying on his side, staring in the deep blue light of early morning at the unoccupied space opposite. He feels a hard thud against his ribs. His hand moves instinctively for the gun beneath his pillow.

Stalking to the open doorway of the bedroom, he scans the landing and looks across to the closed door of Hannibal's room. Stepping over cautiously, he leans in and listens. Nothing. His eyes fall on the door handle. Two possibilities flash across his mind. Death. Sex. More likely the latter. Will pushes the thought into the back of his mind and continues downstairs.

Gun poised, he sweeps the kitchen and heads slowly towards the living room. He stops when he reaches the threshold. Hannibal is sitting in an armchair beneath a blanket. Head resting on a cushion, his hair has fallen across his eyes and his lips are parted slightly as he sleeps. Biting back the rising emotions, Will continues his sweep. Scans the rest of the living room. Moves to the window. Checks outside. Leaves the room to check the other corners of the house. Goes outside into the garden, the cold invading his tee and shorts. Comes back in.

Stood again at the threshold of the living room, Will watches Hannibal. The cold outside had sharpened his senses, and he stands there as the early flakes of snow melt away into water droplets on the exposed skin of his arms and legs. His feet are frozen from trekking outside bare. The thudding beneath his ribcage has started to calm. The emotions are rising. He doesn't try to quash it. He walks up to the armchair.

A familiar scent reels him in, pulling him up from the dark depths with a promise of death, but also one last glorious glimpse of the sun. His eyes slip open, pupils adjusting to the black eye of a muzzle staring back. He blinks, looking past the hard lines of the firearm to find Will squatting at his feet. He doesn't look pleased.
“I was having a pleasant dream,” he says with half drawn eyes.
“You expect Daniel to be interested?” says Will flatly, still pointing the gun at Hannibal's face.
“You were in it,” he says, slipping his hand out from the warmth of the blanket to clasp the barrel.
Will's eyes fall on the back of Hannibal’s hand.
“Does it give you pleasure,” Will says in mimicry of Hannibal, unable quite to mask the frustration in his voice, “flaunting yourself?”
“Are you fearing for my life, Will?” he asks, letting go of the gun and pulling up into a sit. "Daniel favours his hunting knife," he explains, hands clasping together in his lap. He glances thoughtfully over to the gap in the curtains. "It is my belief he would wish to engage in close combat as opposed to taking a cheap shot from a firearm." He looks at Will, still crouched before him.
Eyebrows lofting at his remark, Will slowly straightens up into a stand.
"He took a cheap shot at me," he says lowly. "You may recall."
Hannibal drops his eyes to Will's thigh, tilting his head.
"What did he call you back in the forest?" he says, eyes flitting up to meet Will's. "Little stag?"
Will lifts his chin. Perhaps, Hannibal muses to himself, he is trying to imitate that moment he'd stood watching down at Hannibal after he'd been shot by the Dragon. How imperious he had tried to look then. Almost haughty. And yet, to even begin to feel on par with Hannibal, Will needed him on the floor and bleeding. The irony brings a smile to Hannibal's face.
"He has no idea what I am," says Will, and Hannibal stares harder into him, lashes low.
"No," he agrees quietly, head still titled as he gazes at Will with unabashed fondness. "He doesn't."
"And neither do you," Will adds, spearing Hannibal with a look which is most certainly haughty as he turns to walk out of the living room, eyes holding Hannibal's for a beat longer than necessary. It is hard for Hannibal not to smile deeper.
"Are you flirting with me, Will, or is that your sexual frustration talking?" he says, watching the other's back. Will stops.
"I take it you didn't masturbate, then?"
Will puts his hands on his hips and hangs his head with exasperation.
"No, Hannibal," he drawls, "I did not."
"You should," says Hannibal chirpily. "It'd be good for you."
Will turns to face him, his expression pinched. Hannibal considers those knitted eyebrows. Will never was very good at maintaining a poker face, he thinks to himself.
"When have *any of your suggestions ever been good for me?" Will asks, suddenly unable to stop a smile twisting his frown. He stands there looking indignant and incredulous, and ready to laugh. Hannibal sometimes forgot how infectious Will's laugh is. It's not often he is blessed with it.*
“Your wellbeing is important to me,” he says simply with a charming smile. "As mine is to you, it would seem."
The smile fades and Will glances aside.
"It's just more convenient if you stayed alive," he says quietly, then turns round and walks out of the living room.

They're sat at the breakfast bar with a seat between them. Will hunched over a bowl of cereal. Bedelia sipping coffee at the opposing end. Chewing slow, he glances sidelong at her satin-clad figure. Eyes the new charcoal coloured bath robe and presumes Hannibal knows her preferences intimately. They were fake husband and wife for a time, after all. And close, in their own questionable way, even before Florence when they spent many days and nights together. He wonders what type of lingerie she is wearing beneath the robe. It would be unlike Hannibal not to purchase a complete wardrobe for their special guest, he scoffs inwardly, returning his attention to his cereal. Idly, he realises he has never once bought Molly sexy lingerie in the time they’ve been together.

"Did you sleep well?" he asks to fill the silence.
"I did, thank you," answers Bedelia.
A pause as she takes another sip.
"Did you?" she asks in return.
Hannibal comes into the kitchen just as he is about to answer. He is already dressed in a three piece. His hair immaculately lacquered.
"I have a proposition for you both," he announces brightly, excitedly, watching them like a patriarch known for being overly stern and cruel to his household so nobody knows how to react when he expresses anything different. Bedelia tilts her head to show he has her attention. Will lowers his spoon.
"I presume this has something to do with the vacation we were discussing?" suggests Bedelia, and Will can't stop the hot burn of betrayal before it wrinkles his brow and sets his jaw. Hannibal chooses not to acknowledge the darkening in his expression.
"Yes," he says, smiling. "For the three of us."
Will glances at Bedelia. Finds her watching him over the rim of her cup as she takes another sip.
"Are you expecting him to follow?" Will asks, looking at Hannibal.
"If he feels so inclined."
A pause.
"Where?" he asks.
"Europe," says Hannibal.
"Where in Europe?"
"It's a surprise."
Will scoffs softly, fiddling with the spoon as he glances aside. Suspects Bedelia already knows the destination. He feels them watching him until, exhaling through the nose, he leaves the spoon and folds his arms. Lifts his gaze to meet Hannibal in the eye.
"What about the dog?"

Paris

Chapter Notes

That evening, Will goes into Hannibal's room to get his travel case. As he walks into the bedroom, privately taking note of the satin dressing gown draped over the made bed, he finds the other stood before the neatly organised compartments of his open wardrobe. In his hand is the bottle of aftershave which Will had helped himself to whilst Hannibal was away.
"Do you like this, Will?" he asks, taking off the lid of the bottle and giving the remaining contents a perfunctory sniff. "I always thought it lacked subtlety."
Will moves to stand beside him, hands on his hips as he idly scans the contents of the wardrobe.
"Fitting an animal of the domesticated variety," Will mutters, eyes settling on some polished shoes.
"Those are unpredictable," says Hannibal appeasingly, putting the lid back on the bottle and returning it to the shelf. "They have the element of surprise, which makes them more dangerous."
Will hums, eyes on the cologne bottle.
"So long as I'm not travelling as cargo," he utters.

“The airline we’re using allows domesticated animals to travel accompanied in cabin,” says Hannibal. “You can sit on my lap if you like.”
Will turns his face towards Hannibal, seemingly unperturbed by the other’s smile.
“How about you sit on mine?” he counters flatly, and Hannibal’s eyes fall to a half close.
“I can’t promise I’ll behave for the duration of the flight,” replies Hannibal, the quiet playfulness of his voice somehow affecting Will more than he’d like to admit. Egging him on.
“Then I will just have to chastise you if you don’t,” says Will simply, eyebrows lofted. There is a slight twitch to the corner of Hannibal’s lips as he continues to smile and regard Will closely.
“By what methods?” he asks.
“You don’t want to know,” answers Will.

A sharp jet of cold air is blowing down against his neck. Will reaches up to the overhead dials, fiddling with the knobs to turn it off. He hates this part – waiting for something to happen. He had forgotten how restless it made him. Hannibal and Bedelia are sat together on the row of seats to his left. On Hannibal’s lap is a glossy program titled Opera Comique. His hands are clasped together, resting on top of it. Glancing up at his face, Will finds his eyes closed. Past him, Bedelia is reading the airline magazine. A flight attendant is making her way down the aisle, performing checks. She smiles at Will, and he returns the gesture even though it feels alien. Perhaps this trip will do him some good. Remind him of what it means to be an involved human being again, able to connect not just with murderers of a crime scene, but the rest of humanity. Ever the recluse, though, he still hopes their stay in Paris won’t mean elaborate gatherings and dinner parties. Knowing Hannibal, though, that will be exactly what their stay will entail, precisely because he knows it will make Will uncomfortable.

He waits until the aisle is free before speaking.
“Do you think he’s on this flight?” he asks quietly, staring at the interactive screen in front of him without taking any notice of the flight details playing across it.
“If he is, he is not travelling Business,” replies Hannibal. “I didn’t see him in the queues.”
“He would have hid somewhere and watched us from afar.”
“Perhaps. Or he could have come in disguise and be sat amongst us now.”
Will glances at the passenger sat to his right. A Chinese woman in her fifties.
“Even if he has, what is he going to do?” says Will lowly. “Stab me with a plastic knife?”
“It’s not so much the weapon as how you choose to wield it,” states Hannibal sagely without opening his eyes.
“I know exactly how to use mine,” says Will darkly.
“And yet nothing has happened.”
Regarding that smile flatly, Will grunts and sits back in his seat, deciding not to dwell on the implicated meanings of such a comment.

It was at least an hour’s drive from the airport to this area of the city. Hannibal had chosen not to disclose their accommodation, but Will had still predicted something rather glamorous. It was as though the idea of keeping a low profile never even crossed Hannibal’s mind, with his sheer arrogance of staring fate in the eye. But neither did Will ever raise any serious concerns. It was infectious, such recklessness, and so long as he was with Hannibal, he thrived on a certain fearlessness. Bedelia would probably see it differently. Stupidity is probably what she would call it, but there was no denying that being in Paris lent the situation a certain *je ne sais quoi.*

Will looks out the window in the back of the taxi. Like the other buildings in the vicinity, their hotel is a typical example of Parisian architecture: five stories high with an elegant Haussmannian façade of beige stone blocks carved with classical mantels framing evenly spaced, rectangular windows – the largest of which is the same size as a set of double doors, and belongs exclusively to the second storey. Everywhere he looks, he sees elegant brickwork with Roman mantels and stone balconies. A wrought iron railing wraps around the storeys above ground floor, and below the distinctly French

mansard roof, a classical relief of a woman's head crowns the highest room. Will would not be surprised if that is the very room in which they will be staying.

The taxi drives off and they head towards the entrance, wheeling their cases behind them. Walking past the flanking planters with their individual round hedges, they come to a set of glass doors which slide away automatically, allowing them to continue down the mirrored entrance with rows of white orchids leaning towards them from either side. Their feet click sharply across the white marble floor as they round the decorative rug and desk displaying open art books, brochures, and various other leaflets advertising the most romantic city in the world. The receptionist greets them with a smile and as Hannibal speaks to them, Will surveys the spotless lobby. A square archway at one end, flanked by pillars topped with marble busts, marks the entrance of a bar and dining area. An alcove to the side is decorated with framed pictures and furnished with a comfortable couch, a coffee table laden with more reading material, a lamp, and an armchair.
"The lift is just around the corner," explains the receptionist. "We hope you will enjoy your stay."

One room is on the seventh floor. From there is a private lift which leads up to the second. Will had assumed Hannibal and Bedelia would be sharing, but when Bedelia enters the private lift, Hannibal doesn't get in with her.
"Get some rest," he says. "We will see you at the restaurant at 6.30."
The lift doors slide to a close, shutting Bedelia from view. Hannibal leads the way to their room. Will follows after.

The suite is spacious and bright. Pastel coloured cushions perch on a white leather settee and matching armchair. Fragrant flowers of the same colour sit in a crystal vase on a side table.
"What do you think?" asks Hannibal as he takes off his coat.
"It's very…white," answers Will, suddenly imagining a splash of colour across the walls. Red.
Hannibal heads towards a stairway leading to the rest of the suite. Will takes off his coat, draping it over the armchair before following. Climbing his way to the top, he discovers the wall to his left is replaced by the huge glass pane of a shower stall. It is big enough for a group of people.
"Would you mind if I used the shower first?" asks Hannibal, already slipping out his cufflinks.
"Go ahead," Will utters, eyes on the bed in front of them. He walks past Hannibal and into the attached room where a circular table stands in the dark with two accompanying chairs. Imagines them sat there in the morning, eating breakfast. Stepping back into the bedroom space, Will watches Hannibal take things out from his case.
"Did you remember your tuxedo?" he asks as Will sits down on the bench at the foot of the bed.
"Yes."
"Cufflinks?"
"Yes."
Hannibal straightens up and regards Will with a pleased expression.
"Good," he says simply before moving his hands to the buttons on his waistcoat. Will watches his hands. Hannibal watches Will. He pauses.
"Would you rather I undressed in the bathroom?" he asks, and Will looks past Hannibal to the glass wall at the end of the room.
"It makes no difference," he answers, even though he would in fact prefer not to have to watch the other undress. Hannibal turns and walks towards the bathroom.
"Would you be so kind as to unpack our cases?" he says. "Being the domestic creature that you are."
Will doesn't answer, but moves to the cases regardless. If he busies himself with their contents, he won't have to watch the other exposing himself through the glass wall. Another glass wall. He wonders if Hannibal is thinking the same.

He showers without looking through the glass, but occasionally, a certain movement on the other side draws his attention and he glances towards it. Wearing just his shorts, Hannibal has rolled over on the

bed, his back facing Will. The Verger brand is visible from where Will stands, as are the scars marking each bullet's entry. A nap before getting ready, he'd said. Will finishes up and steps out of the shower. Wrapping a towel around his hips, he ventures back out into the bedroom towards the chest of drawers. Opening the top drawer one-handed, Will takes out a pair of shorts and, after patting himself dry, slips them on before walking round to the unoccupied side of the bed. He only realises he should have maybe put a tee on when he's already sitting down. A glance over his shoulder tells him Hannibal is asleep. Or pretending to be. Carefully, he peels the waterproof bandage from his thigh and checks the wound before reaching for the new bandages left by Hannibal on his bedside table.
"You smell nice," Hannibal murmurs.
"Not of dog?" Will snorts softly, fixing the clean bandage in place.
"No. Just death."
Will pauses but doesn't look back at the other, his eyes on the bandage.
"Like you?" he asks eventually, voice low and quiet.
"Same but different."

The restaurant is busy when they show up. Under the dim lighting, finely dressed figures create elegant shapes perched on leather bar stools or sat at candle lit tables with mirrored tops. Bedelia is already sat at a table. It is easy for Will to spot that golden head, even from behind. She is wearing a dress with a low scooped back, the exposed groove of her spine running between the subtle protrusions of her shoulder blades. She appears to be studying the menu in her hands. They make their way over, Will taking note of the muted tones and hushed energy of the room, catching snippets of conversation in French. Hannibal greets Bedelia by resting his hands on her shoulders and turning his face to kiss her cheek. He moves to sit opposite her as Will approaches and mimics his actions, pressing a chaste kiss to the other cheek. The gesture is strange, probably for the both of them. Yet Will feels a sense of roleplay is appropriate for the occasion, and even chooses the seat beside Bedelia as opposed to Hannibal, the latter being his natural choice, perhaps from habit more than anything. As he sits there, studying the menu and listening to Bedelia and Hannibal converse, Will contemplates the reflective surfaces of the tables. Each one revealing a different collection of faces with all their varying expressions. It creates a strange simultaneous sensation of space, but also an inability to escape the gaze of others. Something catches the corner of his eye and he looks down at the mirrored surface of their table. Sees the Wendigo and his female counterpart. Sees something even more misshapen sitting beside them.

Opera

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Opera Comique is within walking distance, but due to the snow, they have taken a taxi. Sat beside the driver, Will looks out the window and can see Bedelia's reflection in the window behind. Her hair casts a bright halo against the backdrop of night, tumbling in a cluster of curls tucked aside to expose the slender stretch of her neck, framed above by a delicate jawline and below by the soft haze of mink. His eyes search for Hannibal in the rear-view mirror and finds the other's face turned towards the window. His profile a picture of sophistication – the forelock combed immaculately to the side. Eyes lidded. A smile on his lips suggesting he's aware of being watched. Returning his attention to the streets of Paris, Will spots an old man walking a large black dog. As it lifts its muzzle to the snow, it reminds Will of the one waiting for them back home.

The taxi pulls up on a street beside the opera house. Will opens his door to the icy evening breeze and feels it teasing through the curls of his hair as he steps out. He opens the passenger door, offering his

hand to Bedelia. She takes it and he pulls her slowly onto the gritted paving. The elegant tail of her dress slips out of the vehicle and he ducks his head to peer at Hannibal as he puts away his wallet. He offers his hand and Hannibal takes it before stepping out onto the pavement. As he straightens up, Will can see the glow of lamplights reflecting in his black eyes. Hannibal smiles and turns his attention to the lights lining the entrance to the opera building behind Will. Bedelia is already walking towards it. The taxi drives off behind them.
“Here we are again,” says Hannibal, his breath misting in the air.
“No experiments,” Will utters, and Hannibal looks at him, still smiling.
“If you say so.”

The Baroque structure of the performance means it will only run for an hour. There are other short performances prior to and after, but Hannibal is only interested in the opera house’s special one-off for the evening. While Hannibal and Bedelia fix their attention upon the stage, Will surveys the people sat in the boxes to either side of theirs, in the wings below, in the rows of the stalls. He considers the spaces where one can sit without being seen, those seats with the obstructed views of the stage, but not of a particular box. Twenty minutes in and he has barely paid any attention to the performance itself. He can’t sit there any longer, feeling like they’re being watched. Rising from his chair, he excuses himself and exits the box. He stands alone in the empty lobby until the hushed swing of the double doors makes him look back over his shoulder. Hannibal is walking towards him. Without speaking, they walk on together, turning left down another hallway illuminated by the dim glow of a chandelier. Surrounded on either side by classical depictions restored in muted oils and the endless tiers of gilded gold from above. Hannibal looks at the paintings as Will keeps watch, setting the pace. They continue walking in silence, taking one hallway after another. Eventually, he starts to follow the overhead signs for the restroom.

Pushing past the door, Will leads Hannibal beyond marble sinks and huge, imposing mirrors. He stops at the last cubicle, holding the door open so Hannibal can enter the small space. Going in after him, Will eases the door shut and stands facing the door with his arms folded. Stood behind him, Hannibal takes a casual sniff of Will’s neck, and he turns his face to glance back at the other, but does not comment. Soon, the restroom door opens, drawing their attention with the hushed sound of heavy wood swinging on brass hinges. The sound of footsteps on the marble floor makes Will dip his hand into the pocket of his trousers. Fingers seeking the smooth edges of the folding knife. As the footsteps approach their cubicle, he slips it out without a sound. Opens the blade. The footsteps stop on the other side of the door. Will takes a silent step back, left arm held out from his side as though to shield Hannibal whose chest now presses against his back. His breath stirring Will's hair.
“Mathis?” asks a voice. Not Daniel’s.
Will says nothing.
“Sors,” it continues to say, tone irritable. When Will shows no intentions of moving, he feels Hannibal laying a hand on his wrist, and moves to press himself against the wall of the cubicle. He lowers the knife but leaves it open as Hannibal unlocks and opens the door, obscuring Will behind it.
“Oh. Excusez-moi,” says the voice in apology. Will watches Hannibal’s face.
“Mathis n'est pas là,” says Hannibal, his eyes giving the other a curious once-over. Pressing the knife to a close, Will slips it back into his pocket before stepping out from behind the door and pulling the edge of the door back. A young Frenchman stares at them, his dark eyebrows lofting in surprise.
“Pouvons-nous vous aider?” Will utters, scrutinising the neat facial hair and tailored suit.
“S'il vous plaît excusez-moi. Je cherche un ami,” he says, eyes moving from Will to Hannibal.
“Voulez-vous vous joindre à nous?” says Hannibal with a smile.
“Y a-t-il de l'espace?” the young man asks.
“Non,” replies Will, closing the door.
“Amusez-vous,” says the man airily from the other side. Neither Will nor Hannibal comment further as they stand inside the cubicle, waiting for him to leave. Will keeps his gaze on the floor as he listens to the footsteps. He feels Hannibal watching him. Is suddenly affected by an awareness of their close

proximity.
“Well that was fun,” says Hannibal once they are alone again. “May we return to the performance now?”
“Sorry,” Will utters, watching the other tug delicately at his shirt cuffs.
“Don’t be,” says Hannibal, regarding him with a smile. “We could still bump into him yet.”

Bedelia does not look their way when they come through the double doors and return to their seats on either side of her. As Hannibal always said, there was a woman who knew how to look after herself. Eyes still on the stage, she turns her face towards Hannibal.
“You were gone a while,” she murmurs. He leans his head closer to her.
“So long as I’m back for the final aria,” he says in a hushed voice.
Will falls back to scanning the stalls. As he skims over the rows of people, he notices the Frenchman from the restroom. He is smiling in their direction, a hand lifted in greeting. Will stares at him woodenly.
“An acquaintance of yours?” asks Bedelia.
“Just someone that Will was rude to in the restroom,” answers Hannibal.

When the final aria arrives, even Will has to stop with his preoccupation and listen. It is as though the atmosphere in the auditorium changes with the first key being played on the baroque organ, the first, slow drag of the bow across the cello. The first, delicate strum of archlute strings accompanying the melancholic bass. When the actual aria begins, Will feels unease at the jarring meters and lines foretelling the goddess’s imminent destruction. The straining crescendo of violin and viola drags like a wire through the clay of his being. A glance over at Hannibal tells him the other could be feeling the same. His expression is passive, but there is a faint, liquid wavering beneath his low sweeping lashes. In joy or sorrow, it remains a mystery. The air fills with the soprano’s voice which soars with the high notes before falling like a deep and mournful sigh. Will looks away, suddenly feeling as though he has intruded upon the other’s privacy.

Back at the hotel, the bar is empty and quiet when they approach the bartender. Hannibal orders some drinks and they continue to stand as they wait. Bedelia had already bid them goodnight and gone up to her room.
“Are you disappointed we didn’t see him tonight?” asks Hannibal as he watches the bartender. Will folds his arms upon the bar next to him.
“He stood us up,” he says, watching the bartender place a glass in front of him. “Merci.”
“Did you enjoy the performance?”
“I was a bit distracted.”
Hannibal makes a sound of understanding. Will watches him take a sip of his drink.
“In this performance, the destruction of Dido takes precedence,” explains Hannibal. “Allowing little sympathy for the actions of Aeneas.”
Will sips his drink and pauses in thought, eyes still on Hannibal.
“Does he deserve sympathy?” he asks.
“Aeneas struggles with his desire to comfort Dido in her pain,” Hannibal continues to explain, turning his face to look at Will. “The time he spent hunting with Dido was considered a momentary abandonment of his true destiny.” He looks away, taking another sip. “Virgil chose to emphasise Aeneas’s conflicted nature.”
For a moment, neither of them speak as they stand there, sipping their drinks.
“Virgil did not idealise love,” says Will eventually, voice quiet. Hannibal smiles and watches Will with lidded eyes.
“The arrow shot causes only destruction,” he murmurs.

Come midnight, they venture up to their room. Once inside, Hannibal shrugs out of his tuxedo jacket and makes more drinks as Will sits down on the settee. He receives the glass of wine from Hannibal

and watches him settle into the armchair. For a while, they merely sit and drink, each seemingly content with the silence. Hannibal eventually stops refilling their glasses and sets his down on the side table.
"How is your thigh?" he asks as Will swallows the last of his wine.
"Getting there," he answers, licking his lips and gazing at the bottom of the glass. "How is your shoulder?"
"I've stopped noticing."
Will looks up at Hannibal. Finds the other gazing thoughtfully at the wall.
"Do you need painkillers?" he asks.
"Pain is a state of mind."
Will looks down. Torn between apologising for warning the Vergers and continuing to believe he did the right thing.
"I'm going to have another shower," Hannibal announces, and Will watches him get up and head towards the stairs. He gets up too, putting his glass on the table next to Hannibal's.

Under dimmed lights, he untucks the bed and climbs in under the cool, crisp sheet. Head settling into the plush pillow, the light from the bathroom draws his attention and he watches Hannibal undressing in the large circular mirror from the corners of his eyes. Fingers slipping out cuff links and teasing undone the satin knot of his bowtie before pulling the sash free from the stiff shirt collar. The same fingers falling to the buttons of his shirt, undoing one after another until the edges part to curling chest hair and fall back from his shoulders – the patch of gauze shielding the bullet and knife wound. From where he's lying, Will can make out the raised edges of the indistinct crown and the rearing boar. The 'V', the 'E', the 'R'. The shirt is gone, and Hannibal begins to undo his belt. He should look away, but is distracted by the dropping waistband of the other's trousers, revealing close-fitting underwear. He remains distracted as thumbs hook themselves into the elastic band of the remaining garment and begin to drag it down the shapely smooth slopes of – he rolls over onto his side, facing the other way.

In his peripheral vision, Hannibal sees Will turn away. He watches the other as he runs his hands through his hair and down over his face, lips parting with a sigh under the hot spray. Finishing off, he steps out the shower and pats himself dry with a towel. Then he moves to inspect his shoulder in the mirror, peeling off the waterproof bandage slowly. The wound is ugly, but otherwise clean. He decides to leave it uncovered for now. Gathering up his things, he turns off the light and ventures out into the bedroom. The lighting is soft and subdued. He glances at the back of Will's head as he comes towards the bed and puts down the items in his arms. Opening the wardrobe, he removes a hanger and picks up his shirt, slipping it on and stroking it down to remove the creases. When everything is hung up and put away appropriately, together with Will's tuxedo, Hannibal walks over to his side of the bed, untucks the sheet, and slides in beside the other. Will is lying quite central, whether or not he is aware of it. Hannibal watches those dark curls for a moment, then leans in just enough to inhale his scent.

He dreams about having sex with Molly. Arms wrapped around her waist, chest pressed against her back, he thrusts slowly into her from behind. Eyes closed and lips parted to his shallow breaths. When he feels it begin to build beyond his control, he tightens his grip and sinks his teeth hard into her shoulder. His shoulder. Hannibal's. He is biting Hannibal's shoulder. Eyes snapping open, he pants in panic, his breath stirring the hair at the other's nape before he scrambles back. A sliver of moonlight invades through the window. It is enough to illuminate the stretched thread of semen connecting the seeping head of his penis to- Will hurriedly presses the sheets into his lap and twists away, squeezing shut his eyes. Behind him, Hannibal exhales softly.
"How do I taste?" he murmurs, voice husky with sleep. Will reactively licks his lips, but dares not open his eyes. The metallic tang is unmistakable, and the realisation makes him slip a hand up over his face. *What are you doing? He wants to apologise but the words won't come. He knows he won't be able to go back to sleep. Lying there on his side with his back to the other, he waits and waits, until*

the moonlight has faded in the approach of morning. Glancing at Hannibal, Will finds he is asleep. He slips out of the bed and looks once more at the exposed wound at the other's shoulder before walking towards the staircase.

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

“Sors” – “Come out”
“Oh. Excusez-moi” – “Oh. Excuse me.”
“Mathis n'est pas là” – “Mathis is not here.”
“Pouvons-nous vous aider?” – “Can we help you?”
“S'il vous plaît excusez-moi. Je cherche un ami” - “Please excuse me. I’m looking for a friend.”
“Voulez-vous vous joindre à nous?” – “Do you want to join us?”
“Y a-t-il de l'espace?” – “Is there space?”
“Non” – “No”
“Amusez-vous” - “Have fun”

Desire

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

For the briefest of moments, walking under the black and white stripe awnings lining Rue St Honore, Rue Faubourg, Avenue Montaigne, Will can almost believe they are on vacation. They even stopped for lunch at an expensive establishment and sat outdoors for all of Paris to see. Sipping coffee surrounded by boxed hedging and tasting nothing so strong as their own audacity.

Back at the hotel, in Bedelia's room, Will stands with his hands in his suit trouser pockets as he gazes upon the Parisian cityscape. He hears shoes on the marble behind him and sees Hannibal approaching in the window reflection. His black eyes lifting from his cuffs where long fingers are busy fiddling with cufflinks.
"It fits," the man says with a smile. "You look good."
"Thanks," Will utters, and watches Hannibal dip his hand into the breast pocket of his suit jacket. His fingers fishing out a pair of cufflinks. Turning his face, he looks at them sat in the palm of the other's hand.

Wolves

"Am I the alpha?" he says, tilting his head at the moulded silver. Hannibal steps close and takes Will's arm by the elbow to steer his right hand out of its pocket.
"Do you wish to be?" says Hannibal, his eyes on Will's hand as he slips in the cufflink.
"Do you want me to be?" Will asks in return. Still smiling, Hannibal studies the remaining cufflink for a moment before offering it to him.
"Only you know what you want to be, Will," he says. Will takes the tiny wolf and Hannibal steps away. He watches the other's retreating figure in the window before lowering his eyes to the silver design.

As he had anticipated, the party is for the social elite. Glass in hand, Will loses track of time as he paces through one ostentatious room to the next, weaving in and out of the crowd of elegant bodies. Following the sound of that familiar accent into the threshold of a music room. Beneath the radiance of the chandelier, Bedelia stands beside an antique harpsichord, sipping champagne. Her hair coiled high like a golden snake. A young Frenchman is sat at the instrument, eyes creasing as he laughs and itches his head humbly. Hannibal is stood beside him, glass in one hand as he reaches down to touch the keys with his other.
"S'il te plaît, joue-nous quelque chose, monsieur Vilkas?"
The Frenchman touches Hannibal's arm with his hand. Will lifts the glass to his lips and slowly tips it back.

The drone of voices drifts down from the open doors of the second floor balcony. The étage noble. Floating towards him along the quiet and deserted street. They had parked at the end of this obscure road, under a large Linden tree laden with snow. He sits in the back with the door open, and the cold evening air inviting herself into the car, gradually sweeping a delicate dusting of snow across the black leather interior. He soon hears the soft creak of shoes upon the snow.
"S'il te plaît, joue-nous quelque chose," Will says in echo, head tilted back against the headrest. From the corners of his eyes, he sees that tailored suit drawing close. "Monsieur Vilkas?"
"Nebūk pavydus, mažas vilkas," says Hannibal quietly. Will lifts his eyes to the other's face, refusing to return the smile he finds there.

“Aš ne mažai.”
“Ne,” says Hannibal in agreement, his black eyes thawed by the drink. Dark depths obscured by lowering eyelids. “Tu esi didelis berniukas.”
Will holds that heated gaze, own eyes lidding in response, lips parted despite his lack of words as his brain struggles to think of a retort in his limited Lithuanian. Then he sees him. A figure emerging rapidly from the gloom and approaching Hannibal from behind.

Reacting to Will’s distracted eyes, Hannibal slips his hand behind the lapel of his suit jacket the same time Will reaches for the piece tucked against his lower back. The same time an arm latches over Hannibal’s chest and the white flash of a knife’s edge is brought to his neck. Will snatches a breath as a face emerges beside Hannibal’s, pressing temple to temple - the clean-shaven cheekbones and perfectly lacquered hair a startling pale twin of the doctor. *Daniel. His stare burning into Will as the knife breaches the skin. Red heat squirting through the frigid air as Will stirs himself from the initial shock to draw his gun and – a shot is fired, the sound reverberating through the street. The trigger is stiff under Will’s finger as they pant collectively, white breaths mingling fear and pain. Through the flurry, Will sees Bedelia stood up the road behind Hannibal and his assailant, her bare arms straight, both hands on a pistol. Daniel abandons them as quickly as he’d appeared, his suited figure disappearing back into shadow, and Will does not watch after him long enough to see where he fled. He is too busy staring at Hannibal’s fingers as they search for the gaping wound in the side of his throat - at the calm expression on the other’s face. Will realises his teeth is gritted so hard, he can’t even force through a curse as his hands dart up and hang uselessly in the air. Trembling.*
“Tell-tell me what to do,” he utters, barely registering the clatter of Bedelia’s heels.
When Hannibal doesn’t immediately reply, preoccupied as he is with what Will assumes to be an attempt to pinch the severed – vein? artery? – he snatches the stained scarf from the other’s shoulders and throws it over Hannibal’s head, pushing those bloody hands aside as he starts to wind the scarf around Hannibal’s neck, dragging the make-shift bandage round and round, round and round, before the other can protest. Heart thundering against his ribs as blood continues to pump beneath his hands.

The car engine roars to life behind them. Looking back, Will sees Bedelia is already behind the wheel. Backing into the car, Will drags Hannibal with him down onto the backseat and leans across him to yank the door shut as Bedelia puts her foot down. Under the glare of streetlights, Will stares at his own red-dappled hands clutching saturated silk. Hannibal’s eyes are closed as he endures Will’s strangling attempt to staunch the blood flow.
“Is it an external jugular?” Bedelia asks.
“I-” Will stammers.
“Yes,” Hannibal answers, voice tight from the restriction of Will’s hands.
Bedelia falls quiet. Hannibal says nothing. Will looks in the rear-view mirror. Bedelia is frowning in thought as she removes her own scarf and tosses it over her shoulder. Snatching it from the air, Will wraps it around Hannibal’s neck, wishing he had worn his.
“We’re going to Charles.”
“He can help us?” Will asks as he meets her eyes in the mirror, hating the nervous tremor in his voice.
“Perhaps.”

Will frowns harder, glancing at Hannibal whose eyes are still closed. No protest leaving the tight line of his lips. They are at her mercy, Will thinks to himself. Hers and this Charles’s. But what choice do they have? Bedelia returns her attention to the road ahead. Will stares ahead as they join the freeway, eyes unblinking as the road lights wash over them intermittently. As the last pair of lights fades into the distance, darkness descends on them, seemingly magnifying the pounding of his heart until he doesn’t know whether that is Hannibal’s or his own pulse throbbing under his palms. Daniel’s face comes to mind. Haunting him. It was far too easy. How had they let their guards down to such an extent? The gun digs into his lower back from where he had hastily re-tucked it under his suit jacket. He would hold Bedelia at gunpoint if he knew where to go, if Hannibal gave him a signal or a sign.

He closes his eyes and takes a silent breath, but the ease with which Daniel had caught up with them continues to trouble him – the ease with which his knife would have reached the other side of Hannibal's neck had Bedelia not fired her pistol in time. Would the bullet from his own gun have made it in time? He can't be sure, he realises, and this thought sends a deep chill through his being, makes him shudder violently.
"Are you cold?" utters Hannibal. Will opens his eyes and glances sidelong at him.
"Your blood is keeping my hands warm," he murmurs in return, and offers a twitchy smile that lasts for barely a fraction of a second before returning to a frown. "Are you…?"
Hannibal tilts his face in Will's direction, eyes watching him closely under his lashes. Will is suddenly conscious of their close proximity. Of his right thigh pressing flush against Hannibal's. And the intertwining scent of blood and aftershave, into which Will begins unconsciously to lean.
"Does it feel nice?" Hannibal murmurs, his breath stroking warmly against Will's lips.
"Hannibal."
Will leans back at the sound of Bedelia's voice, glancing into the mirror to find her staring ahead at the road.
"Just checking you are still with us."

Whilst driving, Bedelia makes a call through the hands-free link. After a few seconds, a man answers. Bedelia converses with the man in French, speaking in short, succinct sentences. Tone apologetic, but film. Pleading, yet calm. The voice waits until she has finished before speaking. Unsure of how to interpret a conversation he cannot decipher, Will leans his head towards Hannibal's.
"Should I…" he utters under his breath into the other's ear, knowing Hannibal will understand what he means. *Should I change the plans? Even though I'm unsure as to what I'd change them to right now?*
"No."
Will watches Bedelia in the mirror.
"If she…if they…"
"Būk ramus."

Will feels a hand on his thigh and finds its weight and warmth reassuring, even whilst he grows increasingly uncomfortable with the unknown. Who is Charles? How do we know he won't try to kill us? It troubles him to see Hannibal so calmly accepting of his fate, as though confident he is in safe hands. Hands. His hands are still wrapped around Hannibal's neck. Hannibal could have attempted to staunch the blood himself. Will just never gave him the chance to. As he hesitantly begins to peel his fingers from the matted silk, he feels Hannibal's fingers sliding beneath his to take their place. The contact brings him momentary comfort. When Hannibal has taken over the staunching, Will moves away just enough so their legs are no longer touching, and sits with his back straight and his hands clasping his knees to steady them. Ready to reach behind him if needs be.

Bedelia pulls up outside a building of pale stone with steps leading up to a deep porch fronted on the right by a stone balcony that runs between three decorative pillars. Three large rectangular windows are carved into the stone façade of the first storey, their classical straight lines atypical of the Parisian fashion, complete with a sloping mansard roof. On the ground floor, the glow of yellow lamplight can be seen through the muntin on the large casement windows. Will spots ornate furniture with gilded gold edges and frames of the same colour hung up on the walls. Clearly the home of a man of both affluence and influence.

Opening the driver's door, Bedelia climbs out the car and hurries over to the stone steps. Will leans over Hannibal to open the door. As he steps onto the pavement and straightens up, he starts to sway, and Will quickly slides across the seat to catch the other's waist, his hands gripping that suit jacket as he climbs out of the car and tucks an arm around Hannibal's middle whilst standing. Pressing Hannibal's weight against his side, Will helps him towards the house. As they walk, Hannibal's face

leans close to his, and Will glances from the corners to smeared hands still wrapped around a neck now tacky with drying blood. To the loose strands of hair which have been teased free from the lacquer to fall across downcast eyes. The pallor of his skin unnerves Will, makes him quicken his step, even if he is unsure about this.

"Doctor Lecter," says a voice in greeting, and Will looks up from the bottom of the steps. Stood at the open doorway next to Bedelia is a tall dark man dressed in a three-piece suit. The white in his neat black facial hair, in the closely-clipped curls and sideburns – in the colourless discs of his eyes – all glow a cold and uniform silver in the dark. Standing there together, their figures block out the light coming from the house.

"It's good to see you, Charles," says Hannibal, voice more of a mumble than anything else, the sound of which makes Will tense his jaw as he hurriedly leads them up the steps. He loathes to expose any of their weaknesses – his or Hannibal's – to strangers. And they don't have time to waste on formalities. Bedelia goes inside, and the man starts to follow with his hands in his pockets. He turns his face to regard them impassively.
"I wish I could say the same, my friend."

It freezes the blood in his veins to watch a stranger handling Hannibal's limp and increasingly helpless body. Refusing to leave the other's side as he lies on the dining table, Will watches on with folded arms, scrutinising the eyes of Bedelia and Charles lest some secret exchange was to pass unnoticed between them – a signal to end Hannibal made as easy as a loaded blink. And he watched Hannibal equally as closely, looking for a signal, an unspoken glance telling him to draw his gun. Or to seize a razor-sharp instrument. He watches latex-covered fingers probe and press, attaching and inserting things, pulling things through. When Hannibal falls unconscious watching him, Will falls under the added pressure of scrutinising every move with a heightened bout of paranoia. Bedelia's hands as they pass along metal objects stored like cutlery in a kitchen drawer. Bedelia locating as though with prior knowledge, the cupboard door which opens to a chilled space packed tight with bags of blood.

Having repaired the vein, Charles rinses then peels the gloves from his hands. Dropping them into a bin, he walks out of the kitchen with a quick glance back at Bedelia. Completing her check of the transfusion, she leaves the kitchen.

Removing his suit jacket, Will comes to the edge of the table and gently drapes the garment over the one already covering Hannibal. Beneath the white glare of the electric chandelier, Hannibal's skin is bleached of colour. Will's eyes fall on the cannula beneath the rolled up shirtsleeve and follows the intravenous line to the bag of blood suspended above. Dragging a chair up to the table, Will sits down with an exhausted sigh, hands stiff with dried blood that he still hasn't removed as he hunches over, elbows on knees, to press them against his head. On the other side of the kitchen door, he hears the distant sound of footsteps and hushed voices. Dragging his hands down his face, he exhales heavily and sits there watching the tranquil expression on Hannibal's face. Eyelashes still, and lips parted to his silent breathing. His hair dishevelled and falling with an almost boyish grace across his closed eyes. Will can hardly believe the way he perceives the other in this moment – a monster reduced to the mercy of others. Willed or no?
"Why," he whispers his thoughts aloud. *Why did you let your guard down? Has his company made Hannibal complacent? Eyes lowering, he turns the gold band on his left hand as he remembers something he once said to the other. It's not sustainable. If this recklessness continues, it will cost them somewhere down the line.*

He hears the quiet rumble of a car engine and steps out of the kitchen. Looking down the corridor, he sees the front door is open. Charles is stood in front of the exit, a case on the floor beside him. Bedelia

is standing opposite him wearing a borrowed suit jacket, her hands holding it closed.
"We appreciate what you did," she says.
A man in uniform appears on the porch, entering the house once Charles has nodded his permission. The chauffeur picks up the case and slips back out between them, carrying it down the steps to the car waiting at the bottom.
"Consider my debt repaid," he says, pulling on leather gloves. He turns his face to regard Bedelia once more. Will scrutinises the sharp angles of his profile. A blade honed to precision, yet weighted differently to Hannibal. Its true devastation known only to its handler. Like Hannibal, he gave nothing away.
"I don't expect to see you-" he says, glancing directly at Will across the elegant space of his home, "-any of you, upon my return."
"You won't," Bedelia promises.
One last glance of mutual respect between grey and blue before Charles steps outside. Will listens to the quick click of his brogues down stone. As Bedelia eases the door shut, they stand there listening until they can hear the car pulling away. Bedelia continues to stand there gazing ahead of her even when the sound of the car has faded into the distance. Will walks down the corridor towards her.
"How long do we have?" he asks when he is stood across from her, unable to help his admiration for her unshaken nerves.
"A few days," she answers.
"Do you think he will find us?" Will asks and she turns her face to regard him.
"My shot wasn't fatal," she answers. "But as far as I'm aware, we weren't being followed." She studies Will for a moment before adding, "I assume you didn't notice different in your distracted state?"
Will bristles inwardly at her suggestion of weakness, but before he can retort, she walks towards him.
"He grows more reckless when around you," she says as she passes him on the way back to the kitchen.

Will stays with Hannibal and supervises the transfusion. Bedelia comes into the kitchen wearing just a man's shirt. In her arms are other folded garments which she puts down on the side.
"Charles," he says, lifting his eyes from the clothes to watch her. "He's not a fan."
"They had a fight once," she states, arms folding. "Charles lost an eye."
"Why did they fight?"
"Why don't men fight?"
Will can sense evasion from a mile off.
"You have blood on your hands still," she says. "And your face."

After showering off Hannibal's blood and changing into Charles's clothes, Will returns to the kitchen to find Bedelia leaning over Hannibal, her hand clutching a damp washcloth which she dips into a bowl of water and rinses before dragging it around the other's neck and exposed chest. When she has finished, she buttons the shirt back up, and Will moves to help her transfer Hannibal out of the kitchen and into the nearest bedroom without upsetting the intravenous line.
"I'll take over," says Will. "You've done enough," he adds, hating the sound of his own gratitude, and yet he is undeniably grateful to her for saving Hannibal's life. Perhaps he just hates that it wasn't him.

Left alone with Hannibal in the room, Will examines the toolbox handed to him by Bedelia. Opening the lid, he gives the contents a brief study before reaching for the cleaning rod and a cotton patch.
"What do you think of Charles?"
At the sound of his voice, Will smiles despite himself, the relief lofting his eyebrows as he keeps his gaze on the cleaning rod pushed down the gun barrel.
"He was civil enough," he answers. "And he saved your life."
"Now I have nothing to hold him against."
"What did he owe you?"

“Many things.”
Again, evasion. Will lifts his eyes to find Hannibal watching him sleepily through the obscuring spikes of his hair. A little colour has returned to those sharp cheekbones, their edges softened by the yellow glow from the bedside lamp. He sees Hannibal glance at the glass of water on the table and helps him pick it up before bringing the rim to his lips. Black eyes watch him as he sips slowly.
“Did you eat his eye?” Will asks, lowering the glass as Hannibal leans his head back against the pillows.
“I did,” he answers, lips curling in amusement.
“Why did you fight?” Will asks quietly, holding the glass between his hands as he watches those hooded eyes.
“Same reason you fought Richard.”
Will glances down at the glass.
“You were protecting her?”
“Most will act when they see a loved one in peril,” murmurs Hannibal, lidded eyes staring ahead of him. “Tell me, Will.”
He looks up.
“If your wife had fallen with us into the sea, would you have swum to her?”
Will parts his lips at the memory of Hannibal keeping his head above water, and the words come just a touch too late.
“Of course.”
“There you go.”
Will wants to tell Hannibal how powerless he has felt since Daniel turned up. How terrified he is of losing him. But he can’t. So he continues watching that mutual expression on his face.
“She says you grow reckless around me,” he utters.
“Atleisk mano nerūpestingumą. Mano meilė mane silpnina.”
“I need to brush up on my Lithuanian.”
“Forgive me for being careless.”
Will looks down.
“I was careless too.”

He falls asleep in the chair, hand still holding the pistol. The regret he feels at being the inspiration to Hannibal’s recklessness instead of his saviour manifests in his subconscious. But there is something else there. Something dark that makes him speculate alternate outcomes in vivid colours. In one of them, Daniel succeeds, and Will watches the euphoric expression on Hannibal’s face as blood gushes from the gaping smile in his throat, more violent and more vehement than it had in his fantasy in Mason’s barn. Caught in the red rain with a flutter of lashes, Will succumbs to the orgasmic sensation of Hannibal’s wet heat hitting his skin. Interlaced with the terrifying thrill of imminent death. His mind conjures up the backseat of the car. His hands once again squeezing that neck which pulsates as the blood pumps out with a vengeance. The hand on his thigh closes over his arousal which, by the magic of his subconscious, juts out naked from the rest of his body.

Snapping awake with a gasp, he tries to control his ragged breathing as a deep throbbing between his legs makes him look down at the tenting in his trousers. He hurriedly puts his hand over it, but the touch is enough to make him snatch a breath through his nose. Looking at the bed, he sees Hannibal is asleep, and slips silently out of the chair and onto his knees upon the floor. Turning his face towards the door, he digs his head into the edge of the bed as he twitchingly undoes the front of his borrowed trousers. Freeing himself, he starts urgently to masturbate, already so close that he has barely touched himself before he’s ejaculating violently into his hand. His teeth sinking into his bottom lip to stifle the groan threatening to spill while the hammering continues beneath his ribs. As he kneels there trying to catch his breath, fingers stroke suddenly through his hair.
“Mano aistringas berniukas,” comes the sleepy murmur. “Tu svajojo apie mane?”

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

“S'il te plaît, joue-nous quelque chose, monsieur Vilkas?” - "Please, play us something, Mr. Vilkas?"
“Nebūk pavydus, mažas vilkas” - "Do not be jealous, little wolf"
“Aš ne mažai.” - "I am not little."
"Ne" - "No"
“Tu esi didelis berniukas” - "You are a big boy."
“Būk ramus” - "Be calm"
“Atleisk mano nerūpestingumą. Mano meilė mane silpnina” - "Forgive my carelessness. My love weakens me."
“Mano aistringas berniukas” - “My passionate boy”
“Ar tu svajojo apie mane?” - “Did you dream about me?"

Bon Appetit

He avoids leaving the house in case Daniel is around. So he checks what Charles has in stock. Somehow, he is not surprised to find everything neatly packed and labelled. There is a chance Charles could also be a cannibal – he is, after all, an acquaintance of Hannibal's. At least he only has to cook it. Liver and onions. Nutritious enough. Emptying the contents of the pan onto a plate, Will then pours a glass of orange juice. He takes both with him out of the kitchen and down the hallway. As he approaches the open doorway of the bedroom, he stops.

"Where are you going?" he asks.

Hannibal is stood on the other side of the threshold. His lidded eyes fall to the plate in Will's hand.

"Is that for me?" he asks, putting a hand on the doorframe and leaning into it with a smile. "Liver and onions," he says, looking up at Will. "Nutritious."

"Sit down," Will instructs, but Hannibal does not move.

"Will you feed me if I do?" he asks.

"I will feed you if you don't," Will answers sternly, and Hannibal gazes past his shoulder in thought.

"I suppose I can't fight you in my current state," he murmurs, still smiling as he turns around. Will follows him back to the bed and watches him sit down on the edge before passing him the plate. Hannibal takes it and picks up the fork. Will pulls the chair over and sits down with the glass of orange juice as Hannibal begins to eat.

"No sign of Daniel," he says, watching those lips part to the piece of liver on the end of his fork. Teeth sinking into the tender flesh. "He's likely to be lying low like we are." Hannibal chews and swallows. Through the open collar of his shirt, Will spies the subtle undulation of his throat beneath the gauze.

"Does it hurt?" he asks.

"This I can manage," says Hannibal, studying the liver on the end of the fork. "Anything bigger…" he muses aloud with a small curl to his lips.

Will passes him the glass which Hannibal watches but does not take.

"Why are you here, Will?" he asks. "You could be on a plane."

"So could she," Will answers, and black eyes meet his.

"I'm asking you," says Hannibal, putting his hand over Will's on the glass before pulling it close for a sip, but pausing just before taking one. "Has your compassion for me become an inconvenience?"

Will pulls the glass, together with Hannibal's hand, to his own lips and takes a big gulp before exhaling exasperatedly.

"A huge pain in the arse," he utters lowly. "If you must ask."

Hannibal smiles, eyes on Will's mouth.

“How rude.”

The next day, Bedelia is nowhere to be found. When Will raises this to Hannibal, the latter merely suggests she has gone for a walk before informing Will he will be doing the same. Sat on the edge of the bed, Will watches Hannibal getting dressed in Charles’s clothes. It is a convenient coincidence that both men share similar measurements, but also a reminder of the strange eccentricities shared between them. Eccentricities that Will does not feel privy to. The feeling he is not being told everything eats away at him, making him restless. Twitchy, as Bedelia puts it, and the thought of her reminds Will of his growing jealousy of their relationship, as though there is some unspoken understanding between them, the sort that Will thought he had with Hannibal.

“Perhaps you could prepare the salad whilst I’m out?”

Arms folded, Will looks up to see Hannibal trying on a coat.

“Seared beef with pomegranate and balsamic dressing,” he says brightly as he cheeks the length of the sleeves and, finding them satisfactory, begins to button up. “Begin by searing the meat, then, whilst letting it rest, whisk together pomegranate molasses and balsamic vinegar with a little oil and mustard.”

“Are you taking the car?” Will asks.

“I shall be within walking distance,” Hannibal answers, turning around to face Will while slipping his hands into the coat pockets to pull out a pair of leather gloves.

“So will your corpse,” Will utters woodenly, and feels the unexpected whack of leather against his cheek – the contact light and playful.

“You’re not my wife,” says Hannibal, pulling on the gloves. “Stop fretting.”

“Stop telling me to cook.”

“Pretty please?”

Will watches the other’s pout impassively.

“I love it when you feed me,” Hannibal says with a smile before turning to walk out of the bedroom.

Silently, he lets himself into the house, pushing the door to a close behind him. Putting things down on a chair, he removes his outer coat and hangs it up before picking everything up again. Following the scent of cooking, his shoes tread traces of snow across the dark wooden floorboards of the living space and down the hallway. Stopping at the threshold, he finds the dining table laid for three at the end nearest to the door. Will is stood with his back to him at the opposing end of the kitchen, shirt sleeves rolled up, elbows bent. Putting the cake box down on the table, he starts to walk towards Will, the sound of his footsteps making the other pause what he is doing and look over his shoulder. His blue eyes fall on the bouquet in Hannibal’s hands.

“White roses symbolise love sustained by loyalty and reverence,” he explains, eyes on the furled heads of the flowers. He stops at the sink beside Will. Offers him the bouquet. Will lifts his eyes from the roses to Hannibal, then back again, slowly putting down the knife.

“What do I do with them?” he asks, grasping the flowers in a reluctant fist.

“Put them on the table,” instructs Hannibal, taking off his suit jacket and draping it over Will’s arm before stepping behind him to undo the ties of his half apron. He leans in, chest pressing into Will’s back.

"He’s coming,” he murmurs behind his ear before stepping away, fingers tying the apron at his lower back with practised ease. “Is the dressing ready?” he asks as he takes over Will’s position at the work surface, observing the other’s handiwork; the slices of meat are too thick to be ‘ribbons’. He senses Will’s eyes on him, but continues to examine the cuts.

“He’s-”

“The dressing, Will.”

There is a pause. Then a rustle as Will leaves the flowers in the sink and puts down the suit jacket. He fetches the dressing and brings the glass bowl to Hannibal who stops slicing to dip a finger into the dark mixture. Instead of lifting it to his own lips, Hannibal holds the finger to Will’s mouth which opens hesitantly – just enough – for him to slip the fingertip inside. The pad strokes the thick syrup onto his tongue before withdrawing and entering Hannibal’s mouth. Sucking his finger clean, he tilts his head at Will.

"Too sweet?"

Without waiting for a response, he holds his hand out to Will.

“Balsamic vinegar, please,” he instructs, and feels the other pressing the cold bottle into his palm. Glances sidelong to see the troubled expression on Will’s face. *What’s the plan, Hannibal?* A part of him still feeds off the notion of outsmarting Will and surprising him. Taking advantage of his dependence on their partnership. Because it gives him pleasure to make the other feel what it’s like to need him as much as he feels he needs Will. Wants, rather. He has never needed anybody in his life, and is still reluctant to admit he needs anybody even now. Because to admit that would be to admit his own vulnerability, and he never wants to feel betrayal like that ever again. Will is still waiting. Hannibal ignores his silent query and removes the lid of the vinegar, tipping a good swig into the bowl before giving the mixture a quick whisk with a fork.

Their plates are simple but aesthetically pleasing. His eyes observe with relish the curling salad leaves, their vivid green contrasting coolly with the fiery palette of pomegranate seeds scattered in generous handfuls like rubies across haphazardly piled ribbons of flesh. Flesh that glistens beneath the lighting. Tender, moist, and sensuously pink. Offset by the deep garnet of the dressing as it paints dark droplets and miniature rivers against the stark white of porcelain. Sat at the head of the table, he glances at Will to his right and finds blue watching him unblinkingly. *What’s the plan, Hannibal?*

“Bon appetit,” he says with a smile, recalling with a certain fondness how he used to eat with Will. How he’d watched those weighted glances, remembering how effectively they were utilised to pull the wool over his eyes, so willing was he then to be blinded by what he longed for. It still hurts. Now and then. When he thinks about it.

“I’m curious what you will cook for me next,” he says, folding a slice of meat and piercing it with his fork. “Something a little more challenging.”

Will says nothing as he picks up his glass of wine.

“Escargot a la bourguignonne,” Hannibal suggests, sliding the meat into a rich rivulet of jus before lifting it to his lips and taking the morsel into his mouth. The sharp ivory edges of his teeth dragging

the supple flesh off the silver prongs. He takes his time masticating. Savouring the taste of the meat and the growing tension in the unspoken. “Did you know that the concept of a love dart originates from the mating habits of snails?”

“No.”

“Before copulation, each snail attempts to shoot a dart into the other,” Hannibal explains, moving on to his next slice. “The dart itself is calcareous and sometimes shaped like an arrow, but the motion used is in fact a stabbing.”

In his peripheral vision, he sees Will lifting his glass to take another sip of his wine.

“It is sometimes so forceful,” he continues to explain, “the dart punctures the internal organs, or pierces through the body or even head to protrude from the other side.”

Blue eyes meet his over the rim of his glass.

“Maybe we were snails in our past lives,” Will utters, and Hannibal smiles.

“You would mate with me, Will?” he asks, amused.

“I would stab you before you stabbed me.”

Hannibal hums thoughtfully. *Sounds about right.*

They continue eating and drinking wine in silence. Then, just as Will is about to ask, Hannibal speaks up.

“Take a shower if you are finished, Will.”

He feels Will watching him, his lack of response indicative of his acknowledgement of the instruction. As he starts to push back in his chair, Hannibal adds, "I'll bring dessert." Will's eyebrows loft at the comment. *Is that part of the plan you’re not sharing with me? I don’t even know what that’s code for.* Hannibal breaks eye contact to sip his wine. Without much of a choice, Will rises from the table and starts to walk towards the door.

"Will," says Hannibal, and the other pauses, looking back. "Could you open the patio doors, please?" Will's eyes move to the doors. "For some air,” he adds. Will glances at Hannibal before moving to the doors and opening them a crack, as requested. Hannibal thanks him before falling back to his meal. When he says nothing else, Will takes his leave of the kitchen with one last look back at the now open patio doors.

Hannibal finishes eating and continues to sip his wine alone at the table. Time passes. As he rubs a fingertip into the remaining jus on his plate, he senses a presence at the patio doors.
“Hello, Doctor Lecter.”
Lifting the digit to his lips, he slowly sucks it clean before lifting his eyes to the man stood before him.
“Hello, Daniel.”

Daniel

Daniel stands there in black shirt and trousers, scrutinising the items on the table. There is shadow on his face where the stubble is returning.

“Did I interrupt your meal?” he asks quietly, eyes lifting to meet Hannibal’s.

“No. Would you like to have a seat?”

“Tell me how you envisage your end,” he says, ignoring the invite.

“My end?” says Hannibal, head tilting as he observes the other. Understanding the ferocity of that brown stare. “By your hands, you mean.”

Without responding, Daniel remains stood at the opposite end of the table. Waiting.

“I see myself hanging against a tree by the wrists,” Hannibal begins to say, eyes on his glass of wine, the stem of which he begins to stroke idly with a finger. “Naked. With a stick propping open my legs as it would a stag’s. The steam escaping the empty cavity of my body.”

“Start from the beginning,” Daniel exhales, and Hannibal glances up to see him closing his eyes.

“I see myself rolled onto my back, legs splayed for the first incision. You cut me from anus to sternum. Pushing your hands inside to the stomach and the intestines. My organs burning like embers in your hands before you tear them from the spine.”

He sees Daniel parting his lips to breathe. The slow rise and fall of his chest under the shirt. Eyes still closed.

“I see you watching my silent agony as you take yourself in a gore slickened hand.”

He hears Daniel inhaling deeply through the nose.

“You have masturbated to the thought of ejaculating into my body. Painting the bare walls with your semen.”

“Red and white,” Daniel murmurs, eyes slipping open halfway to gaze across the table at Hannibal.

“It’s beautiful,” says Hannibal. “Even though they failed to share your vision. *He* failed.”

At the mention of Richard, Daniel lowers his eyes. Slowly, Hannibal rises from his chair. Starts to pace his way clockwise around the edge of the table towards the other.

“That night you had me where you wanted,” he says, “you could have finished what you started despite being shot. But you didn’t.”

Hannibal continues to step closer towards Daniel.

“Because you realised you no longer hunt me to avenge his death.”

Daniel slowly lifts his eyes to Hannibal as he approaches, turning to face him. He comes close enough for his breath to be felt on Daniel’s lips when he speaks.

“Have you fallen in love with me, Daniel?” he whispers.

Brown stares burningly into black.

“The woman,” Daniel utters.

“Devoted.”

“The man…”

“A sheep among the wolves.”

“My sacrificial lamb?” Daniel murmurs.

“My gift to you,” says Hannibal, eyes closing as Daniel snatches a handful of his hair the same time he crushes his mouth to Hannibal’s. Teeth clicking from the force of collision. Tongues stroking for dominance. Daniel tugs on Hannibal’s hair, forcing his head back, chin up – snapping the thin thread of saliva which had connected their lips.

“Your lamb turns wolf,” Daniel breathes, “let me deliver you, my great stag, from your misery.”

Gazing into brown through his lashes, Hannibal smiles.

“You and Bedelia are truly alike.”

If Hannibal had seen Will’s silent approach behind Daniel, he gave nothing away. As Will watched him draw close to Daniel, he felt his grip tighten on the handle of the knife. When they kissed, Will felt his jaw flexing. Now, just a few steps away, Will sees Daniel jerking his arm – hears the grunt as Hannibal’s own arm moves in response. His hand, Will sees, catching the sharp end of the other’s knife. Lunging forward, Will catches Daniel’s neck with the crook of his left arm, his chest pressing against his back. With his right, he drives the blade deep into Daniel’s lower back. His body stiffens from the unexpected attack, and Hannibal utilises the distraction to grasp Daniel’s hand. In one fast, sharp movement, he redirects the point of his hunting knife – looks Daniel in the eye – and drives it into his gut. Trapped between the chests of both men, Daniel claws at the front of Hannibal’s waistcoast, unable to do anything but utter his pain from each thrust into his body. Panting for his breath, Will snatches Daniel’s hair in a tight fist and jerks on the dark tresses to force his head back and expose the throbbing plane of his neck. Hannibal’s lidded eyes are on Daniel as Will pulls his knife out of his body.

“Look at me,” Will hisses, the blood roaring in his ears. Eyes staring like a feral animal. Black meets blue, and Will drags the knife from one end to the other across Daniel’s throat. Slicing open taut skin. Releasing a red torrent that hits Hannibal’s face, making him press his lips together against its hot spray. Through the flutter of his lashes, Hannibal does not look away from Will. Blue so seething, it boils almost black beneath the angry slits of his eyes. Hannibal’s lips part in silent adoration, his own exhale leaving his chest in a ragged sigh.

Slowly, Will lets go of Daniel. His limp body drops to the floor. Blood runs in every direction on the wood. Dragging his eyes from Will to Daniel’s crumpled body, Hannibal lowers into a squat. The dark pool seeps its way beneath the soles of his shoes as he gazes at Daniel’s face. Those brown eyes lifting with effort to meet black. Their glassy surfaces a mirror to the sharp contours of the indisputable prince of the forest. Hannibal listens to his struggling breaths, a fading background to the fevered panting from above. He looks up to see Will staring down at him.

He could do it now. Grab the hair at the top of his head and drag the stained blade of his knife through his throat. Let go and leave him lying there over Daniel's body. Their blood a confluence of two streams coming together to form the same stagnant lake. He would walk away and wash himself clean of it. Once and for all. Forget he had ever waded in after him to the point of no return. To the point where he would go under, if he had to, and never resurface. Because drowning with him is to breathe. And he cannot stomach the possibility of abandonment; the thought of it twists like a knife lodged deep in his gut.

"My gift to you,' he spits, voice dangerously low. He is aware of the solid weight of the knife still in his hand, yet feels it buried to the hilt in his chest. Jealousy clouding his better judgement. They were words spoken for effect, and both he and Daniel had taken the bait. The latter to his own demise. He closes his eyes to the chaotic pounding in his chest as the adrenaline continues to course through his veins.

"Do you still wish to emulate the moment I took Abigail away from you?"

At the sound of running water, Will opens his eyes to stare at Hannibal as he washes the blood from his face at the sink. He is thrown by the accusation. By the raw reminder for reckoning. By the pained memory of Abigail and the returning sensation of everything that was to be felt that night once the deed was done and Hannibal had walked away. *I gave you a rare gift, but you didn't want it*. Blinking against the sudden and uncontrollable welling in his eyes, Will stands there with his lips parted but at a loss for words as he stares at Hannibal's serene expression while the man dabs at his wet face with a cloth. *Will it never end? /em> Tearing his eyes away, Will turns and staggers out of the kitchen.*

As it turns out, Hannibal had arranged for Bedelia to stay away from the house until they had taken care of Daniel. Now that he was dead, Hannibal called her on a cell to let her know it was safe for her to go home. Will had listened to Hannibal thank Bedelia for her help and turned away, emptying the contents of his glass before pouring himself another. When Hannibal comes looking for him, he finds Will lying on his back on Charles's bed, a bottle in one hand, the other hand lying on his chest as he stares listlessly at the ceiling. Hannibal stands there at the threshold, hands in his pockets, the bandage on his right rubbing against the trouser lining.

"Our flight is at five in the morning," he explains.

"Close the door," Will says without looking over. Hannibal lowers his eyes in thought. After a moment, he speaks up, voice quiet.

"They say Christmas is about family."

Will continues to watch the ceiling.

"Perhaps you would like to visit your wife and son?"

Will's eyes turn to the window. Hannibal follows his gaze. It has started to snow. Will continues to remain silent.

"Will I need to send a card?" Hannibal asks. Last attempt to stir a response from Will.

Nothing.

Hannibal leaves and later returns, stepping into the room and walking towards the bed. He puts Will's documents down on the cover. Glances once more at Will before leaving and pulling the door shut behind him.

Hannibal stirs in the middle of the night to the sight of Will leaning over him, his eyes black and glassy in the dark, unseeing and all-seeing all at once. As the other begins to strangle him, the heated scent of arousal floods his nostrils, and he becomes aware of the hard shape of it rutting feverishly against him. The building friction generated by Will's turgid flesh combined with the constriction of his hands causes Hannibal to grow hard. As Will strangles him with enough force to upset the sutures in his neck, Hannibal starts to fight his grip. The frantic thrusting of his hips tells Hannibal he is already nearing, and he snatches Will's cock in his hand to speed the process. With a harsh, animalistic cry tearing from the back of his throat, Will arches his back and ejaculates over Hannibal who uses the distraction to shove his hand into the throat above and thrust up bodily to flip them over. Teeth gritted, Will fights his grip as he closes his hands around his neck to choke him out of his trance-like state. The harder he strangles Will, the more the other struggles, his fighting instinct lending him a strength and ferocity that Hannibal finds appealing. Eventually, Will punches him hard across the face and he lets go. Will rolls over onto his side, gasping for air. Tasting blood, Hannibal touches his mouth and finds a gash in the middle of his bottom lip. Exhausted, Will quickly falls asleep, and Hannibal lies down with his back to the other and closes his eyes.

Come daybreak, he is trapped in Will's embrace. The large and swollen head of Will's penis strokes persistently against his perineum and up into his scrotum. Hannibal had not previously paid too much attention to this erogenous zone. The arms tighten over his chest, and he hears Will groaning his wife's name in his sleep, the syllables muffled by his shoulder. He feels a growing patch of wetness on his balls where Will's head keeps repeatedly nudging. Despite himself, Hannibal reaches a hand down between his thighs, fingertips finding Will's butting head to push it up against his perineum. The resulting pressure is exquisite, and he can't help but swiftly grow hard. Will is close. He can feel the starkly veined member pulsating under the press of his fingers. Feels it thickening just before climax. Will continues to rub himself against Hannibal until, without warning, he suddenly ejaculates. His semen splatters the inside of Hannibal's thigh, his breathy moan hot against the back of Hannibal's ear. His arms had moved up last minute, cinching tight around Hannibal's neck. The constriction remains even after Will has spent himself and, swallowing against the hard press of his arms, Hannibal forces two fingertips into his perineum. With a sharp gasp, his body tenses and he shoots across the sheets.

Waiting for the pleasure to subside, he becomes aware again of the weight and warmth of Will's body as he continues to sleep against him. He waits for a while longer, listening to the steady inhale, exhale, feeling it on his skin. When he is confident the other will not wake, he slips quickly from beneath his arm and moves silently towards the bathroom.

Jack

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Gazing out the window, at the dark sea of clouds, he thinks of being strangled. Of the way his hands felt around his neck. The way his hands felt around his neck in the back of the car. Blue eyes so anxious one minute, and angry the next. Then full of water. *Mano aistringas berniukas*.

"Tea or coffee?" a voice asks, and Hannibal politely declines without taking his eyes off the early morning sky. Blue eyes with their huge black pupils boring into him in their trancelike state. Ravenous for reckoning. For a release he would otherwise not openly seek had Hannibal not played a hand in its inducement. The sensation of Will's arms around his neck returns to him. As does the warmth of his sleeping breath against his nape. Perhaps it was to be the first and last time.

"Tercio de banderillas," he murmurs to the glass. The second stage in a bull fight, where the bull has lost a significant amount of blood and is exhausted. He wonders if Will will tire of running at his cape. Wonders who will bleed out first if he does.

+++

He had opened his eyes that morning to an empty space on a bed that he didn't remember falling asleep on. The sheets holding traces of a restless body – bodies – traces of his aftershave in the pillow. After he'd checked to find Hannibal was not in the house, he had returned to the bed and sat down in the empty space. Imagined the back of his head on the pillow, like that time at the hotel. He had tried then to remember the back of Molly's head, and found that he cannot recall it with the same clarity. *They say Christmas is about family*. He'd looked down at the documents in his hands. At the note with the other's familiar scrawl informing him of his altered flight time. He'd scrunched the paper up in his hand. Then he'd un-scrunched it straight after, brushing the creased surface with his thumb. *Will I need to send a card?* Despite everything else that clouded his judgement, at the very bottom of it all, he wasn't planning on letting Hannibal write any more Christmas cards on his own again. Or spend another Christmas alone. That was the last thought on his mind as he stood there resolute, with his hands in his coat pockets, watching the runway through the glass wall of the terminal. Then he heard someone call his name. And he knew who it was without needing to look.

Jack.

+++

When the first half hour had passed since the expected time of his arrival, Hannibal had returned his attention to the tablet in his hands. He could feel the dog watching him, and refused to acknowledge their shared restlessness. When the first hour had passed, he'd put the tablet down and gone into the kitchen with the dog following, meaning to make a coffee, but really just standing with his hands on the cold stone surface. The next time he looked at the clock, the hands told him it had been three hours since Will should have walked through the front door. He went back into the living room and picked up the tablet. Went on the website of the airline to find there had been no delays, and the plane had landed on time. He then checked for roadworks. Accidents. Ruling out all possibilities. All were clear. He stood there, staring impassively at the screen. Then, after a moment's pause, he lidded his eyes and began a new search. Selected the next flight out to Rome.

+++

The plane is about to land, and Will listens to the captain announcing the local time. Calculates how long it has been since he should have arrived back at the house. He tells himself he will call Hannibal as soon as he has landed. And checked he hasn't been followed – yet. He wouldn't blame Jack for informing who he must to keep tabs on Will, and he didn't expect the other to buy his story of visiting his family for Christmas. Will was vague when he explained where he had been. *Away*. Jack was vague when he'd responded. *Understandable*. His dark eyes watched Will with so many questions. Questions he would have to answer eventually, but for now, he detracted attention from himself. What was he doing in Europe, Will had asked. Had he not heard, Jack had answered. A prolific serial killer has been leaving police with artwork. He was on his way to meet with a senior investigating officer in Prague. He wanted to know if Will would be in touch. Holding the other's wary stare, Will had answered yes. Jack would find him at Molly's, he'd said.

+++

"I'm going there too."

Hannibal looks up from the brochure to the young Spaniard sat beside him. Unruly dark curls and neat facial hair. Tanned complexion. Mid to late twenties. Handsome with a boyish charm when he smiles.

"The Galleria Borghese," he adds, leaning closer to look down at the glossy pages. The modest but attractive size of his bicep is accentuated by the short sleeve of his tight fitting tee. His aftershave is pleasant. "Sculptures," he says, pointing a finger at an image of a famous Bernini.

"You are a student?" Hannibal asks, head tilting as he observes the other's hand. Large and shapely. As though Bernini had chiselled them out of marble himself.

"Yes," says the Spaniard, smiling so small creases form at the corners of his eyes. He leans back and offers Hannibal his hand. "Lorenzo."

Returning the smile, Hannibal takes his hand.

"Are your parents also fans of the sculptor?"

Lorenzo is still holding his hand.

"No," he says with a mischievous look in his eyes. "But I am."

+++

As expected, his wife receives him with the same warmth and relief as is part of what makes Molly, Molly. Will had closed the front door behind him and they had stood there in an embrace, her cheek pressing into his shoulder, for what seemed like hours. Then Walter came in and he was pulled by his mother into a collective embrace, the three of them stood beneath the Christmas decorations in a picture of festive normality. Eyes on the clock hung on the wall, Will was counting how long it'd been since he tried to call Hannibal. Nobody had picked up.

+++

After exhausting their time at the Galleria Borghese, Lorenzo suggests Hannibal comes back to his place for a drink. It's not far, he explains, and the flat actually belongs to his girlfriend, Giulia, but she's out at the moment.

"Niño travieso," says Hannibal as he walks with Lorenzo.

“Very,” Lorenzo answers, smiling playfully.

Inside the small but artistically decorated flat, Lorenzo tells Hannibal to get comfortable while he fixes them a drink. Sitting down on the settee draped with handwoven throws, Hannibal looks at the paintings hung on the orange walls.

“Did Giulia paint those?” he asks. Lorenzo walks over clutching the necks of two beers in a hand. He offers one to Hannibal who takes it with a polite *gracias* before lifting the cool beverage to his lips. Their eyes meeting as they sip.

“They’re good, no?” he says with a smile. “She based the women off herself.”

Hannibal turns his eyes back on the painting of two females lying in a provocative embrace. Small waists with voluptuous thighs.

“Eres un chico con suerte,” Hannibal murmurs with a curl to the corner of his lips.

“Sí,” the younger man chuckles, taking another sip of his beer before lowering the bottle with a slow lick of his lips. Dark eyes lifting to meet Hannibal’s. “The one in the bedroom is better.”

+++

Will finds it increasingly difficult to hide his restlessness from Molly. Or from himself, rather. His wife and son are used to his aloof behaviour, it seems. Having waved Molly and Walter off and watched them drive off towards town, Will slips the cell out of his jeans pocket and dials the only number he has been dialling for the last couple of days. Eyes on the snow covered ground, he listens to the familiar ringing. Forgets to suppress his gasp when a connection is made.

“Hello?”

At the sound of his voice, Will turns on the spot, thinking of the other’s sensibilities. He puts his hand on the cold wall before him. *Calm*.

“Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas, Will.”

A pause as Will listens to the birds in the trees above. He closes his eyes.

“How is the dog?” he asks quietly.

“He is well,” replies Hannibal. “How is the family?”

“Fine,” Will answers, eyes slipping open to stare at the porch.

“That’s good to hear.”

Pause.

“Have you any plans for after Christmas?” asks Hannibal.

“Have you?” Will asks back, brow knitting.

“Nothing as of yet.”

Will licks his lips and hesitates. He closes his eyes again.

“I’d…like to come back,” he says.

Hannibal is quiet. Will listens to birdsong as he waits, growing paranoid the other has left him hanging. He licks his lips again and breathes in and then out, his quiet exhale a white flurry in the air.

“I missed the flight because I saw Jack,” he begins to explain. “He doesn’t know anything-”

“It was nice to hear from you, Will.”

He feels a sharp stab of panic.

“Wait-”

Followed by the chilling of his blood.

“Take care of yourself.”

“Wait-”

He stands there with the cell pressed to his ear, listening to the monotonous tone of a dead line. The birdsong comes back, louder than ever.

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

“Mano aistringas berniukas" - "My passionate boy"
“Niño travieso” - "Naughty boy"
"Eres un chico con suerte” - "You're a lucky boy"

Persephone

Molly sets the mug of coffee down on the table in front of Jack who utters his thanks but keeps his eyes on Will. She glances at Will and puts her hand on his shoulder on passing as she leaves them to it. They wait until the kitchen door is shut, then wait a little longer, neither saying anything. Eventually, Jack picks up the coffee as Will picks up the brown envelope. He pulls out the stack of photos and starts placing them one at a time on the wooden surface of the dining table. Eyes scanning over the different angles.

“Is it him?” Jack asks. Will studies the remaining photo in his hands. The murderer’s artwork captured in full length. A recreation of a Bernini sculpture minus the heads. The viewer is forced to pay close attention to the male hands on the female body, a famous feature of the sculpture proper, and whose wealth of praise received over the centuries continues to stem from the artist’s mastery of the chisel. To be precise, from a deep admiration of the realistic indentations made by Pluto’s fingers on the fleshy thigh and twisting waist of his abductee.

“The Rape of Proserpina,” Will utters, voice quiet.

“Or the abduction of Persephone to the Greeks,” says Jack. Will feels the other’s eyes on him and recalls Bedelia’s taunting question in the hallway: *was Persephone tricked, or did she knowingly eat the seeds?* He fights the urge to grit his teeth, tense his jaw, swallow – even breathe when he looks up to meet Jack in the eye.

“We’ve seen this preoccupation with her before,” Jack continues to say. Will looks back down at the photos.

“That is open to interpretation,” he says.

“The modern interpretation of Primavera believes the central figure is in fact Persephone, not Venus,” Jack states. “And that the painting depicts her return from the underworld. I need to know, Will.”

At the gravity of the other’s voice, Will lifts his eyes to find dark eyes staring into him from across the table.

“Has he returned?”

Unable to suppress the rising emotions threatening to burst through his ribs, Will pushes back in his chair and turns from Jack to walk towards the window. He stands there staring out into the night, at the moon in the cloudless sky, wondering if *he* is watching it too this very moment.

“I’m sorry,” he half whispers to the glass.

“Then make up for it,” says Jack, and their earlier conversation returns to Will. *What happened that night? I pushed him off the cliff. Then I left. Why? I had to find myself again after I helped him kill Dolarhyde.*

Behind him, he hears the scrape of chair legs as Jack also rises from the table.

“Help us find him, Will. It’s the very least you owe us.”

Will looks down.

“I don’t want to leave Molly and Walter again,” he says quietly.

“They’ll remain under watch,” says Jack. “They’ll be fine.”

Will folds his arms around himself and slowly turns to face the other. Brow knitted, he drags his eyes up to meet Jack’s gaze.

“I can’t do this again,” he pleads gently. His eyes beginning to shimmer. “Please don’t make me,” he continues to plead, voice cracking softly towards the end. Brow creasing, Jack appears to exhale inwardly as he looks to the side and away from Will’s forlorn expression.

“I’m flying out to Florence first thing in the morning,” he says. “You’ll find me at the police station via Pietrapiana. I would be grateful if you will at least consider it.” He looks at Will. “For old time’s sake.”

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He had not intended to lie to either Jack or Molly, and it had surprised him how easily both took the bait, just as it had surprised him how easily the tears had materialised. But they weren’t entirely false. Holding the photo, he had been hit by a barrage of conflicting emotions. Anxiety for Hannibal’s reckless actions which would lead him to being caught. Anger at the spite in the other’s decision to send Will this murderous message – *I don’t need our arrangement. Don’t need you*. *You were merely the sacrifice to placate the monster you failed to destroy*. *And now you’re not here*. Anger at the betrayal, yes. But also hurt. The sound of his sigh is swallowed up by the roar of the spray as he lifts his face from his folded arms to stare at the shower stall through his lashes. He swallows at the suggestion that after all that has happened since the fall, it still comes back to a game of cat and mouse. After everything. *Did you believe you could change me, the way I’ve changed you?* He killed Daniel out of jealousy. Hannibal had made sure Will would, slowly but surely. Every little look and word spoken to pique his proclivities in their time spent together. His damned inclinations toward the other which he thought were mutually inevitable for Hannibal – equally as tormenting. And now he has left him, unable to come to terms with his own actions because without Hannibal, they are incomprehensible. Or only too comprehensible. Closing his eyes, he grits his teeth. Without Hannibal, he is just a murderer. Another wretched killer walking the face of this earth, but one so misshapen and incomplete, he is neither recognisable to himself nor others. The spray washes away the salt, but it doesn’t stop his trembling.

++++

His breath billows out of his lips, escaping as a white cloud into the frozen night. The moon shines bright. So bright, he must hold his hand out to shield his eyes from its glare. He knows Jack is still keeping a close eye on him. He isn’t foolish, even if Will himself had been, making that call to Hannibal. Even though he knew it was likely he had been followed to Molly’s home by Jack’s people since running into him at the airport in Paris. And that Jack would of course had kept Molly and Walter on watch in the event of Will’s – or Hannibal’s - return. Yet he had pushed it all into the back of his mind because he was desperate to hear Hannibal’s voice. Jack had not mentioned a phone call. Perhaps he had not gone as far as to bug Molly’s home. Will cannot be sure of Jack’s trust after tonight. He therefore cannot let his guard down. But he really needs to speak to Hannibal. Wrapping his arms around himself, he turns back inside, knowing it will be better to risk another call, if he is being watched, in the guise of calling his wife or son whilst they’re out.

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Sat on the porch outside the house, Will cannot wait any longer. Molly and Walter have long left. If Jack has really got him on such a close watch, then it's up to him whether or not he will confront Will. Either way, he won't be able to find Hannibal through him – he can promise himself that, and has the means to ensure it. He focuses on the ringing in his ear, licking his dry lips in anticipation of speaking to him. Heart beginning to race despite himself. Because of what he wants to ask after what Jack had told him.

"Will."

He swallows at the sound of Hannibal speaking his name.

"Did you have sex with them?" he asks from the outset.

"Did you have sex with your wife?"

"Answer the question."

"I did."

Will hesitates.

"Why didn't you make love to Molly, Will."

"It's not-"

"My business? Or what you want."

"What do you know-"

"I know exactly what you want."

His voice is calm. Aloof. Bereft of – what had it all been, really? Just more flirtation?

"Unfortunately for your wife, your desire for reckoning has made you impotent."

Will closes his eyes.

"But it can be resolved."

His eyes slip open.

"Close your eyes, Will. And think of me."

Hannibal could just be toying with him again, but Will believes he recognises a faint change of tone in his final words, enough to suggest the Hannibal since the fall, if such a thing really exists. Can read a certain…feeling behind his cruel words. He cannot explain it, only sense it. Unless he was simply projecting his own hopes onto the truncated conversation. After Hannibal hangs up, Will receives a text message.

Even Alexander the Great was ruled by Hephaestion's thighs.

Deleting the message, Will looks out across the snow covered land, and without understanding its origins, allows the faintest flurry of warmth to emanate from his chest.

++++

Jack does not visit that night. Will retires to bed with Molly. He responds when she touches him, watching her movements in the soft glow of lamplight. Everything about her is comforting – her gentle smile as she watches up at him, her familiar smell, her hands holding on to his biceps. Her quiet panting as Will moves. But it's not enough. And he leans down, pressing his chest into hers, face burying in her neck. Closing his eyes, he breathes her in. Remembers waking up alone to the smell of his aftershave. And when his eyes creep open, the neck he is pressing against is bleeding. Pushing back up on his arms, he looks down to see Hannibal watching up at him. Eyes lidded, lips parted to his breaths. His throat a gaping smile from which the dark red fountain flows. Squeezing shut his eyes, Will thrusts harder, fingers curling into the sheets to stop them from wrapping around his wife's neck. The urge fights him, however, and even though he keeps his eyes closed, he hears a whisper in his ear.

Does it feel nice?

"Will?"

His eyes slip open to Molly's worried expression, her lips still parted to her shallow breathing as Will continues to move above her.

"Are you alright?"

Will stops, releasing a ragged sigh and moving off his wife.

"I'm sorry," he utters as he climbs hurriedly off the bed and makes his way to the bathroom. Locking himself in, he walks over to the toilet and puts the lid down. Sitting on it, he hunches over with his elbows on his knees and head in his hands. Paris returns to him. The sensation of his chest pressing against the curve of his back. The memory of opening his eyes and looking down to see – only briefly because he had reacted so quickly out of panic – his penis withdrawing from the groove between those cheeks. The taste of his blood on his tongue. Slowly sitting up and leaning back against the toilet, Will wraps a hand around his still erect cock. Licking his dry lips, he imagines those moments before waking, and hesitantly begins to stroke. Sees himself with his arms wrapped around his waist on the bed, hips moving frantically against the other's backside. Hears the slap of skin on skin as he ruts. Arms tightening around his waist. Lips parted as he pants heavily against his skin. Getting close. Tightening his grip on himself, Will lifts his other arm and sinks his teeth into the flesh as he imagines them sinking into Hannibal's shoulder - biting down hard to stifle the building groan as he jerks his hand to a breakneck pace – choking his leaking head with his fist until, arm muffling his cry of release, his back arches to the force of his climax, and he comes to the image of Hannibal looking back at him over his shoulder. A pained and helpless expression on his face.

Thessaloniki

Opening the bathroom door, Will looks through the gap to see Molly lying asleep in bed. Silently, he closes the door again, and sits down on the bathmat with his back to the bath. He pulls up Hannibal's text message from his memory. *Even Alexander the Great was ruled by Hephaestion's thighs.* Hannibal isn't in Florence. Will had neither encouraged nor discouraged Jack's theory that he would find Hannibal reunited with Primavera. Jack's fundamental mistake, however, was to interpret the central figure in the Botticelli painting – be it Venus or Persephone – as Hannibal. Who Jack really ought to speak to, Will scoffs inwardly, is Bedelia. Though it is anyone's guess whether or not she will impart information to Jack. Will likes to believe that, after everything, she may not be so forthcoming. He looks down at the cell phone he'd kept hidden in the bathroom. Looks up artwork of Persephone linked to Alexander the Great and finds two predominant examples. The first, a floor mosaic depicting The Rape of Persephone. Located in the second chamber of the Amphipolis Tomb in Amphipolis in Northern Greece. However, there is currently no public access due to excavations still being underway. The second he finds is a wall painting of the same subject in the first tomb of the royal burial cluster of Philip II, father of Alexander the Great. Reading the description on their website, he learns the tombs are protected behind glass walls. It triggers memories of Hannibal's imprisonment at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Will knows which artwork he will be paying a visitation to.

Will makes his leave after Boxing Day. Staying outdoors at night wearing very little had helped to bring on the flu, especially when Walter had not been well over Christmas. Molly said he didn't have to go with them to see her parents if he wasn't feeling well. He had apologised, but she only pressed a gentle kiss to his brow, telling him not to worry about it. He should have felt at least a twang of guilt as he lowered himself back beneath the covers, watching her smile as she stroked his curls before leaning down to press her lips to his, regardless of his illness. She always was stronger than people thought. When she closed the door to their bedroom, he had felt a clear sense of finality, and tried not to imagine the concern in her eyes when she should later come to realise that their last kiss was in farewell, and she would never really understand why, or find answers in the regretful words of an explanatory note. As his mother used to say: *don't apologise unless you mean it*.

There was still the issue of Jack's men. But unbeknownst to Will, Hannibal had already sent someone to take care of them. Come nightfall, there is a knock on the front door, and he opens it to a familiar face. Standing in her scarf, long coat and boots, she greets him without a smile.

"Merry Christmas, Will."

"Merry Christmas, Chiyoh," he says in return, looking down at the sniper rifle cradled in her arms. "Have you brought me a present?"

"No," she says impassively. "But he has."

A pause at the mention of Hannibal. Then he exhales a quiet breath, blowing a white cloud from his lips.

"Has he sent you to kill me?" he utters lowly, eyebrows lofting expectantly – yet he knows he would not be standing here talking to Chiyoh if that was really the case.

"He would most likely prefer to do that himself."

“Of course,” Will sighs, unable to help the half smile as he looks up at the night sky. That’s so Hannibal, he thinks to himself. “He wants to see me?” he asks quietly, returning his eyes to her stoic face.

“I think my presence already answers that question,” states Chiyoh. “Nobody will be following you to the airport. Keep a low profile.” She steadies the rifle before pushing a gloved hand inside her coat. Pulls out some documentation and holds them out to him. “You may wish to use these.”

Will accepts the fake passport and papers.

“Thank you.”

“Even if I may be sending you to your death?” *Do you still want to go with him?*

Will looks up at her. *Abigail watches him with a smile.*

“Yes.”

++++

The average temperature in Greece at this time of the year is around twelve degrees. Warmer than home. But he knows only one thing can help thaw this frozen core deep down, and stood before the low, green hill in the falling rain, watching the entrance to the royal burial cluster, he can already imagine him standing in front of the glass. Waiting.

Climbing down the steps in darkness towards the lit up façade at the bottom, Will stops to observe the tomb entrance done in the style of a Doric temple and cannot help feeling as though he really is descending into the underworld. As he makes his way through to the main body of the museum, he passes various artefacts inside glass displays glowing in the dark like holy relics in white and gold. There is nobody else around, except for one other visitor. Pacing towards the first tomb, Will sees him. Stood to the right in front of the glass wall. Wearing a long coat with his hands in the pockets. In the dim lighting, Will can see his hair is lacquered and immaculately combed. The glass reflects his curious and contemplative expression as he gazes into the space of the tomb. Unconsciously, Will runs a hand through his own curls before stepping in the other’s direction.

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“No sketchbook?”

Hannibal smiles as he continues to peer through the glass at the painting on the left wall.

“Hello, Will,” he says in greeting, letting his eyes fall on the other’s face and reading the familiar attempt to suppress his emotions. “Where is Jack?” he asks mildly, taking a perfunctory glance around the museum behind them.

“In Florence,” replies Will, and Hannibal hums thoughtfully, returning his attention to the tomb.

“Did you tell him I would be there?” he asks curiously.

“I told him nothing,” Will answers, his eyes on the wall through the glass. Hannibal does not comment and continues to study the painting. Due to it being on the left wall, his face is turned so Will can see him clearly despite their eyes not meeting.

“Does it feel strange,” he says after a while, “being on the same side.”

“Depends what either side represents,” says Will. “We may both be trapped.”

“Do you wish to be free?” he asks.

“Do you?”

“There are some things which cannot change irrespective of one’s wishes,” says Hannibal. “You may wish to not know where I am and what I am doing, yet here you are. Perhaps you have already researched the best cliff to throw us over again,” he adds amusedly.

Blue meets black from the corners. Will does not return his smile. Hannibal resumes gazing through the glass.

“Where are you staying?” he asks.

“Someplace in Thessaloniki,” Will replies.

“Old town?”

“Yes.”

“Me too.”

For a moment, neither says anything else as they stand before the tomb.

“Perhaps we can have dinner together,” says Hannibal eventually, turning from the glass wall to find Will watching him - the disconcertion apparent in his eyes. *Where are you going?* Hannibal has to make a conscious effort not to smile. He removes his hand from its coat pocket and offers Will a business card. He takes it, studies it briefly, and puts it away.

“It’s good to see you, Will,” he says before walking away and feeling the other’s eyes boring into him all the way to the exit.

++++

The architecture in old town Thessaloniki is cramped but colourful, with Macedonian straight edges and wooden shutters on windows. Looking up, Will sees simple square balconies made of metal or wood, the upper levels of the houses extending out over the narrow street due to the limited space. Many buildings are painted white, with the traditional orange terracotta roof tiles. Making his way down one particularly steep and winding street, Will finds himself getting lost more than once before finally arriving at the destination on the business card. The accommodation of Hannibal’s choice is a tall, narrow, three storey building with white walls and black windows. Crowded in by a tall wall to the right and a neighbouring, older building to the left, much of the ground floor is also obscured by heavy foliage and the tangle of various plants growing from terracotta pots. Climbing the tiled steps to the black iron gate, Will lifts his eyes to the row of windows on the top floor, expecting to see Hannibal emerging from their dark depths to watch down at him.

Finding the room number written on the business card, Will puts his hand on the door and pushes it open to the sound of spraying water. Stepping into the room, he closes the door behind him. The sound is coming from the door to his left. He scans the room, taking in the modern, minimalist décor and neatly made bed. The glass doors leading on to a small balcony. Walking across the white tiled floor, he stops at the black oak desk and picks up the tablet left there by Hannibal. The screen glows to life under the touch of his fingertips. The play icon appears for a video. Slowly, he sits down in the chair beside the desk. He touches the icon.

A pair of eyes come into view, large and almond shaped. Pretty. The camera is moved back to reveal the rest of her – wide smile, tumbling black hair, tanned skin. Small but shapely breasts. Behind her, Hannibal is stood naked with a blindfold over his eyes. Hands held behind his back. A man, also naked, with tanned skin, unruly black curls and neat facial hair is stood behind Hannibal with his arms folded around him. When the female moves to the side, the man's hand can be seen wrapped around and stroking Hannibal's erect penis. A double-looped cock ring strangles the thick base and the top of his balls.

The girl moves to sit on the edge of the bed in front of Hannibal. Her waist is small, and her hips wide with sensuously heavy thighs. They part eagerly as she reclines and speaks to the man who murmurs something into Hannibal's ear before nudging him forward with his own body. Falling onto his hands above the girl, Hannibal releases a soft groan as she grabs his wrapped cock and guides it into her. The man mutters words of encouragement in another language as he grips Hannibal's hips and pushes down on them. Arching back, the female gasps and whimpers in pleasure as Hannibal starts to thrust. The man moves away and comes towards the camera, picking it up to take obscene close ups. The sound of his own arousal can be heard, and eventually he returns the camera to its place and disappears from view as her moaning grows more urgent. When the man returns, he is rolling a condom over his large, girthy shaft.

The female claws at Hannibal's back, her voice climbing a few octaves as she approaches her orgasm and finally comes with a half scream. Her partner wraps his arms around Hannibal to tug him off her, his cock dragging out and twanging up painfully swollen. He pushes Hannibal down onto his stomach. She moves out of the way as he leans over Hannibal, his penis in his hand. The camera is picked up and held over Hannibal's passive expression as he lies on the sheets, panting quietly for his breath. It moves to focus on the large head of her partner's cock as it rubs back and forth along Hannibal's entrance before forcefully pushing in. Whatever sound Hannibal may have made is lost under the man's deep groan of pleasure as he buries his fat head past the tight ring of muscle. The girl continues with this close-up until he has loosened Hannibal enough with his thrusts to pull out completely and reveal the beginning gape in his anus. He continues to fuck Hannibal hard. The girl's awed murmur can be heard in the background as he pulls out suddenly, whips off the condom and tugs himself off urgently. The camera captures both the man's and his partner's groans of relief the same time it focuses on the thick white spurts of cum hitting Hannibal's skin.

Will does not know how long it has been since the shower had stopped. The bathroom door opens. He hears feet stepping out onto the tiled floor. His eyes remain on the screen of the tablet.

"Do you like it?" Hannibal asks.

Nightlife

Slowly, Will lifts his eyes to Hannibal. He is stood at the threshold of the bathroom. A towel is wrapped around his hips. There are beads of water trapped in his chest hair and the spikes falling across his eyes.

“The camerawork is rudimentary,” he admits, lifting a towel to rub at his wet hair. “But captures what it needs to.”

Will lowers his eyes back on the screen of the tablet.

“Haven’t you ever filmed yourself and Molly having sex?” Hannibal asks offhandedly. “Maybe whilst Walter is out, so he doesn’t come running at the sound of his mother’s screams.”

Inhaling a silent deep breath, Will puts the tablet down on the desk and slowly stands up. He removes his coat and drapes it over the chair. He looks at Hannibal from the corners of his eyes.

“I’m using your shower,” he says before stepping into the bathroom and closing the door behind him.

++++

Pressing his brow to the tiled wall, Will tenses his jaw as he tightens his grip on himself under the spray. He has to release some of the frustration before stepping back outside and facing the other, and he does not care if this is obvious to Hannibal. He can provoke him all he wants, Will tells himself, but he will not go for the bait. Refuses to give the other the satisfaction of playing him yet again. Even if his traitorous body has responded to the video – to the sight of Hannibal lying passive as he is being penetrated – he is dealing with it. Hand stroking faster, he bites back a groan as he feels it building, and when he finally shoots, it is with the small satisfaction that he did not take it out then and there on Hannibal as the other had most likely intended him to.

++++

When he comes out of the bathroom, there is a clean shirt and trousers left for him on the bed.

“Did you know Thessaloniki is also known as the bride of Thermaikos?”

Will glances over at Hannibal sat in the chair with the tablet in his hands. His hair is unlacquered and falling in soft spikes across his eyes. The black fitted shirt he is wearing is open at the neck. There is a strong scent of aftershave hanging in the air.

“No,” Will utters, drying his hair as he looks down at the white shirt on the bed.

“How hungry at you?” Hannibal asks.

“Not very.”

“Good. I was thinking we could go to a few bars before dinner. The ones here are known for their artistry and good atmosphere.”

When Will does not immediately respond, he feels eyes on him, but does not look over.

“Unless you don’t want to,” adds Hannibal, and Will unwraps the towel from his hips to begin wiping down his body, fingers brushing the smooth surface of healed tissue. Glancing up, he sees Hannibal watching him, his eyes on his scar.

“Since when did that stop you,” he utters.

++++

They spend the evening walking around the port city, passing by the lit up historical monuments and pausing at the end of the Aristotelous Square to gaze without speaking upon the undulating seafront. Frequently, they delved into small but reputable bars tucked away in every nook and cranny Hannibal had read about, eventually finding themselves on the rooftop of a popular cocktail bar. Reclining against the seating, neither of them had spoken as they watched the lights of the city skyline. Due to the cooler winter temperature, very few people were sat outside. But Hannibal didn’t seem to be in the mood for conversation. When Will glanced sidelong at him, he saw the chilly breeze stirring the spikes across his eyes, and the expression of mild content on his face. But Will knew better, and without saying anything, he downed the rest of his drink before turning his eyes on the city and the unknown of the night stretching out before them.

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After a small meal at the same bar, Will had expected them to either part ways, return to Hannibal’s accommodation, or return to his. He was not expecting Hannibal to suggest a nightclub. Nevertheless, Will had gone along with it. Now he leans with his arms folded upon the bar, waiting for their drinks. Watching Hannibal on the dancefloor. His hair illuminated by the blue shafts of light falling from the ceiling onto heads and shoulders bobbing and swaying in the dark sea of bodies. The bartender puts down their order, and Will picks up his glass to take a sip as Hannibal bends his head down to speak into the woman’s ear. She looks over at Will and smiles. Then she pulls away from Hannibal, her hand trailing down his arm. Will watches her weave her provocative figure out of sight. He keeps his eyes on the dancefloor as Hannibal joins him back at the bar.

“What did you say to her?” he asks, lifting the glass towards his lips. The music is loud, and they have to shout to be heard.

“That I would eat her out all night long,” answers Hannibal simply before taking a sip of his drink. “And I’m teaching you how to.”

“Another Sophia?” Will asks darkly.

“She’s got a friend with her,” says Hannibal. “In case you prefer not to share.”

Will downs his drink and leans in to speak into Hannibal’s ear.

“Come to the restroom.”

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When he pushes through the door and steps into the restroom, a hand immediately grabs him by the throat. Realising it is Will, he lets himself be pushed against the tiled wall.

“We’re leaving,” says Will, his voice low and dangerously quiet. His eyes boring into Hannibal with all the suppressed rage of the unsaid.

“My apologies,” he murmurs. “I assumed the wolf was hungry.”

“Not for them.”

Hannibal tilts his head, eyes lidding.

“Will you force me to eat your cock again, Will?” he asks with a smile. As expected, Will stares wordlessly at him for a moment. “Or did I not tell you about that time after we killed Richard.”

Another hand joins the one already at his throat as Will begins to strangle him in earnest. Gripping the other’s wrists, Hannibal takes in the setting jaw, the wide staring eyes burning him with their angry depths. Enjoys the tell-tale signs heralding the onset of reckoning. He can almost smell the fury.

“Is this what you thought of,” he strains to utter against the grip of his hands, “as you fucked your wife?”

A hand lets go to smack its hard ridge of knuckles across his cheekbone. Face whipping to the side from the impact, Hannibal anticipates the second and catches Will’s fist before it can land again. Jerking his hand back, Will grabs the front of Hannibal’s shirt and pulls him off the wall before turning him around and pushing him backwards. His back collides with a cubicle door as Will shoves him inside the confined space and locks the door behind him. Hannibal’s eyes watch the hand behind Will’s back, and when he pulls out the knife, he is ready for it. Catching his wrist, Hannibal shoves his other hand at Will’s throat the same time Will pushes his hand into his face. As they strain against one another, Hannibal launches a knee into Will’s crotch. With a grunt, Will crumples just enough for him to wrench the knife out of his grasp.

Grabbing the front of Will’s shirt, he spins them round and shoves Will down onto the toilet. Holding the knife to Will’s throat, he snatches at the belt on his trousers. Will grabs Hannibal’s shirt with one hand, and tries to grab his wrist with the other, but not before the point of the knife is brought down with enough force to sink through the top of his hand. As Will growls in pain through his teeth, Hannibal pulls the knife free the same time his other hand undoes Will’s trousers. Doggedly, Will continues to fight him even as he tugs down on the band of his underwear to release his trapped erection. Shoving his bleeding hand at Hannibal’s face, Will begins to push off the toilet seat when he feels the damp flat of the knife pressing against his shaft. He pauses, looking down, then up into Hannibal’s eyes. Chest heaving slowly from his efforts.

“It would be a shame if you lost this,” Hannibal pants lowly through Will’s grasping fingers on his face. “For you, at least.” He licks then bites onto the other’s hand, and for a moment they stare heatedly into one another, blue glaring into black. Will refuses to relent, and digs his fingers harder into Hannibal’s cheeks and jaw. In return, Hannibal bites down harder, until skin tears and blood begins to run, and Will is forced to jerk his hand back from those cruel incisors. He tries again to grab Hannibal’s wrist and is rewarded with a nick from the sharp edge of the blade. Shallow but stinging like a bitch all the same. Snatching a breath through his nose, Will pauses as the knife flicks up to press under his chin. He looks up and meets Hannibal in the eye.

“This is happening,” says Hannibal darkly. “With your obedience or your blood decorating this cubicle floor. In my experience, one is more compliant when one is slowly bleeding out.”

Will is still as Hannibal leans his face down.

“Little wolf,” he murmurs tauntingly, eyes falling on Will’s parted lips. Feeling the brush of his quickening breath against his own mouth. “Did you think you could be alpha?” He looks up into blue with a smile.

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Will bides his time. Taking a deep breath to steady the adrenaline coursing through his veins, he plants his bleeding hand against the wall of the cubicle, but keeps a fist in Hannibal's shirt. Sits still as Hannibal puts one foot on the toilet seat between his legs. He glances down at the polished surface of the shoe.

"If you would."

Will lets go of Hannibal's shirt to tug the laces free, doing the same when the shoe is swapped. He lifts his eyes to hold that black stare as Hannibal eases off his shoes and, with practised ease, undoes his belt and trousers. Will does not look away as Hannibal's underwear and trousers are tugged down and off his legs. He can't, however, help glancing down at the other's erect cock. The knife pushes his chin up and slowly he reclines until the hard edge of the toilet is digging into his back. Watching up at Hannibal's calm expression, Will feels the other taking his good hand and moving it down to grip the base of his own cock. In his peripheral vision, he sees Hannibal bracing a hand against the cubicle wall. Then, as he stares up into lidded black, he feels the unexpectedly wet pucker of Hannibal's anus begin to press down on the tip of his dick. The restroom door swings open and a couple of voices can be heard conversing loudly on the other side of the cubicle door. Will tenses his jaw, eyebrows drawing together with the effort to remain still as Hannibal continues to sink down his length. Inch by inch. His body unbearably hot. His passage excruciatingly tight. Laughter erupts from outside the cubicle as the conversation continues in Greek. Will feels his heart thundering beneath his ribs and closes his eyes with a lick of his lips. Cannot tell if the hard, throbbing pulsations are emanating from his own body or Hannibal's. He swallows when those thighs press flush against his own, and opens his eyes to look down. Jaw flexing at the sight of his cock buried up to the balls in Hannibal's arse. At the thought of his dense girth stretching that impossibly tight ring of muscle.

The voices continue with the sound of zippers being dragged and fluid hitting ceramic. Hannibal moves his arm to brace his hand against the wall behind Will's head, and he feels that lewd hole pulling up the sides of his thickly veined shaft – snatches in a breath just before it abruptly sinks down again. Lips pressing together, Will squeezes his eyes shut as Hannibal proceeds to ride him into the toilet. Coming down faster each time. His hands dart to catch the other's moving hips, fingers digging into Hannibal's skin as he tries to slow the pace. Head falling back, his eyes slip open to the sight of Hannibal's parted lips. That black gaze boring into him as his body clenches like a vice around Will. Tormenting him. Making it unbearable. Chest beginning to heave, Will listens for the footsteps heading towards the door. For the swing of the door falling to a close before grabbing the globes of Hannibal's arse and pulling him up his cock until there's just enough space for him to slam back up.

"Mn-" Hannibal grunts, lips pressing together as Will buries himself once more inside his tight heat. Fingers digging with bruising force into Hannibal's hips to keep him in place, Will grits his teeth and thrusts up into him so hard, the toilet seat begins to clatter furiously from his exertion. As his body jerks from Will's efforts, the faintest furrow appears in Hannibal's brow. And when his dark gaze lowers, breaking eye contact, the gesture – misread or not – of submission, frees whatever it is that has been holding Will back. Snatching Hannibal's wrist, Will slams his hand against the wall of the cubicle, knocking the knife free from his grip. As it falls with a clatter onto the floor, Will clasps Hannibal's arse with both hands and, with a feral growl, thrusts bodily off the toilet. Slamming him into the cubicle door, Will hooks his arm under Hannibal's leg as Hannibal braces his hands against the cubicle walls. Grabbing himself by the base, he lifts that leg higher as he pushes back inside to sheath himself to the hilt in the other's cruel, sweet heat. Brings his face close enough to bite onto Hannibal's bottom lip as he starts to fuck him hard enough to rattle the door on its hinges. Chests heaving, lips running dry from their feverish panting, neither Will nor Hannibal is able to look away from the molten chaos of wrathful desire in the other's eyes. But when Hannibal moves a hand off the wall, Will catches it before it can reach his cock and pins his wrist against the door. He bites down hard enough to cut into Hannibal's lip with his teeth, and as the other exhales a low groan, Will sucks

hard on the stinging surface, drawing out blood. Teeth letting go, he lids his eyes at Hannibal, tongue swiping his blood over the surface of his own lips.

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“No,” Will utters lowly, swallowing before he pulls out and suddenly rams back in. Biting back a groan, Hannibal arches against the door, his head falling back. His body pushing up against the hard surface with each of Will’s slow, stabbing thrusts. Each one rubbing him raw from the inside, out. The sweet forceful stroke of that thick cock against his prostate making him leak a copious rivulet of precum beyond his control. But that glare pins him as hard as Will’s punishing prick. *No*. The other’s attempt at dominance is admirable. Perhaps even dangerously subversive if he is not careful. The door swings open again. More people come in. But Will does not stop. He continues to fuck Hannibal as curious voices draw towards their cubicle. Like a man possessed, Will sees only Hannibal. Hears only Hannibal as he smacks his hips into him, unaffected by the questioning voices leering and shouting in Greek nor the sound of hands slapping and knocking on the door. Fingers claw down the front of his shirt, ripping through the buttons to pinch and twist cruelly at a nipple. Feeling it building inevitably from deep down, Hannibal arches down desperately into Will’s bucking hips. The perfect angle making him whimper uncharacteristically – the sound lost under the ruckus of voices on the other side. Will slams ball-deep into him one more time, and he comes with a low, throaty moan, shooting in heavy, erratic spurts over his own shirt. Some lands on the floor with an audible *tak*, scattering the men on the other side with groans of disgust.

As they lose interest and begin to exit through the door, Will pulls out of Hannibal – drags him off the cubicle door to spin him around and shove him backwards against the toilet. Falling onto the seat, Hannibal does not resist when Will grabs the hair at the top of his head and tugs to bring his face closer to the swollen head in his frantically jerking fist. Eyes dragging up from Will’s engorged cock, Hannibal watches the other’s chest heaving beneath his clean white shirt before looking up to the lips parted to his heavy panting, to the half-closed eyes watching down at him through his lashes. This is Will Graham. A picture of unabated desire. Then those dark eyebrows suddenly knit together, his lips parting wider in an expression of pain, to the beginning of a guttural groan, and Hannibal glances down to see the sudden thickening of the sides of Will’s shaft. Feels the wet load of his climax hitting him without warning in the face. Growling hungrily, Will continues to tug, his rapidly jerking fist coaxing out the remaining angry spurts of semen as they hit and run down Hannibal’s chest past the open edges of his torn shirt. Holding still in Will’s grip on his hair, Hannibal lifts his eyes from the slowing hand and his slick, gradually wilting member.

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Letting go of Hannibal’s hair, Will feels the other’s eyes on his face and closes his own to ground himself. When he opens them again, he looks askance as he makes himself decent. Runs a hand through his hair as he glances down at Hannibal sat on the toilet, his lip bleeding, his hair mussed. His soiled chest still heaving gently beneath his ruined shirt. The blood from Will's hand still on his jaw. For a moment, those lidded black eyes meet his gaze before looking down again, his hand moving up to wipe Will’s semen from the sharp edge of his cheek, drawing his attention to the darkening bruise. Jaw tensing, Will turns from the sight to open the cubicle door and step outside.

Melina

Chapter Notes

New Major Character Reference can be found in End Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal rinses his hands in the water and turns off the tap. Looking up at his reflection in the mirror, he runs a hand through his hair and feels a corner of his mouth tugging upwards at the sight of his bruised cheekbone and cut lip. But it's the unseen that causes the most pain, and his smile deepens at the ache accompanying each step he takes towards the restroom door. *Mano aistringas berniukas*.

Leaving through the back door of the nightclub, he starts to make his way down the alleyway when the sound of footsteps and murmuring tells him he has company. He stops and turns around to face the group of men. Five of them. Eyes bright with varying degrees of intoxication. He asks in Greek if he can help them, and one steps forward from the pack. Tells Hannibal he can help himself to all five of them if he wants, then calls him something derisive and spits in disgust. Hannibal looks the man over, then does the same to his company. In Greek, he tells them he doesn't think they would be able to satisfy him, seeing as they all have such small cocks. Unbeknownst to Will, the warmth he'd left in his veins following their coupling – imaginary or otherwise – was, to Hannibal, on par with a narcotic high, and loath to feel it fade, he craves more. Hungers for it even after all those drinks at the bar following his clean-up in the restroom. None of which had managed to take the edge off his hankering for Will. But, seeing as he has no idea where the wolf has gone, he will settle for lesser game.

"Gentlemen," he says. "It is not a bad night for a fight."

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Finished with her shift, and ready to go home, Melina hears shouting on the other side of the door and pushes it open to see a group of men crowded around someone on the ground. One of them appears to be pulling him up by the front of his shirt before landing another fist across his face.

"Hey!" she shouts, propping the door open and stepping out. "Leave or I'll call the police!"

A couple of them look her way, and she grimaces - it looks as though an animal has taken chunks clean out of their faces. The leader pulls his arm back.

"I'm calling the police!" she shouts again, louder this time, and the men begin to murmur. The victim receives one more hit before they start to leave, but not without spitting at the ground. When she is sure they have gone, Melina hurries over to the man. Finds him lying on his back, panting quietly for his breath. He is bleeding from an ugly gash on his cheekbone and a bad tear in his lip. He is also developing a black eye. But the way he gazes through half closed eyes at the sky, you would think he couldn't feel a thing. Bending over him, she tries to catch his eye.

"Are you alright?" she asks. "Can you get up?"

Slowly, he pulls himself up into a sit. She watches his hand moving to press against his side. Suspects they must have been kicking him whilst he was down.

“Do you need an ambulance?” she asks, but he turns his face and regards her with a smile.

“I’ll be fine,” he says, getting up unsteadily. “But thank you.” She watches him stagger a few steps away then begin to sway. Sprinting over, she pushes against his side to prop him up. Looking askance, she finds him watching the ground listlessly. She asks him where he lives. It’s not far, he says, and when she suggests calling a taxi, he tells her it’s fine. He will walk. Melina is troubled by that look. She has seen it many times before, and only two months ago did she dissuade a man from attempting to drown himself in the water off Aristotelous Square.

“I’ll take you back,” she says.

++++

Sat on the bed, Hannibal feels the girl watching him from the door.

“Thank you,” he says, his eyes on the balcony, but she remains standing at the door. He senses her anxiety.

“How did you get your scar?” he asks, watching the night sky.

“Defending myself,” she answers quietly. “They don’t like it when you fight back.”

“But you did.”

“I had to.”

Hannibal turns his face towards her. Sees her looking pensively to the side.

“Men are animals,” she mutters under her breath.

“Yes,” he agrees. “They can hurt you where others can’t see.”

She looks up at him.

“I’m glad they didn’t manage to hurt you like that,” he says, and she looks down again with a frown.

“They did…but not for long at least,” she says, even quieter.

“I had a knife too. But he overpowered me.”

The girl is quiet. Her eyes lifting hesitantly to meet his again. A little wider now, with understanding. Mistaken or otherwise.

“It didn’t take very long.”

“I’m sorry...”

“Don’t be.”

A pause as they watch one another.

“I’m Melina.”

“Thank you for your help, Melina.”

“If there’s anything you need…”

“Actually, there is.”

Hannibal lowers his gaze.

“What is it?”

“Will you stay?”

A pause as she hesitates.

“Just until daybreak?”

He watches her lips part, but say nothing as she watches back at him. Deliberating. Perhaps remembering how alone she had felt the night it happened. A glance at her watch. Not many hours left of the night.

“It’s my first night here in Thessaloniki,” he explains, looking down at his hands in his lap. “I’m used to being alone, but...”

“Just until daybreak.”

He looks up into her eyes.

“Thank you, Melina. You are very kind.”

++++

Stood shirtless before the sink, Will stares at the knife wound in his hand, remembering the time, years ago now, when Hannibal had held it in his own as he wound the bandage around him with surprising gentleness. Nothing he has felt since has ever matched such tenderness. Perhaps nothing ever will again. He flexes his hand, watching the distorting mouth of the wound. Sees, suddenly, the shape of Hannibal’s lips, parted to his shaky breaths inside the cubicle, and imagines if Hannibal had called that night instead of Margot. He hadn’t known, then, of Will’s game. If they had gone to bed, would he have ridden Will slow and savouring, like he was the final morsel of his favourite dish? Black eyes watching down at him with open, unguarded emotion? Will cannot even imagine what that would look like. All he knows is the fury in which they abused one another’s bodies in that restroom the night before. And that he wanted it. Vehemently. The Will Graham who had sex with Margot Verger has become a daydream in the wake of this dark reality nurtured by Hannibal, and the thought of the other playing an orchestrating hand in every step of their journey following the fall makes the anger surface like an uncontrollable flood. Until all he sees is red. And yet, despite all that, a part of him knows he wouldn’t have it any other way.

++++

Reaching the top of the stairs, Will paces over to the door and stands there in front of it, watching down at the handle. It was left unlocked last time. Lifting a hand, he presses on the wood. It does not ease open. He pauses for a moment. Runs a hand through his hair. Lifts his hand again to knock on the door. He expects to see lacquered hair and eyes lidded with calculating composure. When the door opens, he sees a girl. Not knowing what to say, he says nothing, and continues to stare at her. Sensing his surprise, she turns her face away from Will before speaking.

“John,” she says. “Someone here for you.”

“Let him in, Melina.”

The girl steps aside and Will enters the room the same time Hannibal steps out of the bathroom in a dressing gown. The sight of him makes Will freeze.

“Hello, Thomas.”

Will feels his lips parting, but is unable to speak. Hannibal steps past him to the girl.

“I have to go now,” she says. Will stares at the bathroom in front of him.

“Thank you for staying,” says Hannibal.

“Look after yourself.”

“Take care, Melina. And thank you again.”

Will hears the door closing behind him and slowly turns around to stare at the back of the other’s head.

“What happened?” he eventually asks.

“I believe the expression is,” Hannibal begins to say as he turns to face him. “He bit off more than he could chew.” He smiles, then lowers his gaze. Will cannot stop staring at his face. At the black eye barely obscured by the soft spikes of his hair falling across his brow. At the bruised and cut cheekbone. The bruised and cut lip. For a surreal moment, he suspects Hannibal of having spiked his drink at the nightclub. That he’d used more force than he can remember. Maybe in the heat of the moment, it would have brought him satisfaction to leave his mark on the other. But he didn’t do this.

“Who,” he begins to ask, voice low.

“Melina helped me back,” says Hannibal evasively, walking over to the wardrobe. “I asked her to stay,” he adds, opening the door and reaching in.

Will glances at the neatly made bed.

“We didn’t have sex.”

“I wasn’t asking if you did,” Will utters. He realises he is clenching his teeth. Closing his eyes with an inward sigh, he moves to sit down on the edge of the bed. Leans his elbows on his knees to ground himself amidst the conflicted emotions raging through his mind and making something ache from within his chest. He’s still angry at Hannibal. And now he’s angry he’s also feeling concern for him. Angry at the ones who had the audacity to touch him. Angry he is a little jealous of Melina.

“I’m glad you came,” says Hannibal. Slowly, Will opens his eyes and lifts them to watch the other tucking his shirt into his suit trousers. The skin on his knuckles have split. “I’m meeting someone with information on our artist.” He finishes tucking himself in and removes a matching suit jacket from its hanger. “I thought you might want to join me,” he adds, meeting Will in the eye.

“Don’t you want to find the ones who did this to you?”

Hannibal looks away as he pulls on the suit jacket.

“No.”

Will continues to watch him.

“So are you coming?” he asks without looking over.

Will looks down at the floor.

“Why ask when you already know the answer.”

“So you know you have a choice.”

“Do I.”

“Yes, Will.”

He looks up, watching that bruised profile.

“You always have a choice.”

++++

He knew it was a bad idea, and he still went along with it. Once more, he is letting the other lead the way. But he can’t let Hannibal out of his sight. Not when he won’t tell him what happened. Not while he seems disturbingly indifferent to the idea of self-preservation. Will doesn’t know what to do with this Hannibal. Doesn’t know what to do with the fact that they have now fucked, but are behaving as though they hadn’t. Doesn’t know if it’s supposed to mean anything beyond a mere confirmation of how messed up their relationship is. And still, Hannibal wishes to resume the chase with Will, and he would have welcomed this, were it not for the fact that Hannibal is back to murdering innocent victims, just to make a point – in part to Will – and to gain the attention of the killer. Will recognises the old arrogance behind such intentions, but he cannot reconcile it with that lowered gaze. There remains a part of Hannibal that Will is not privy to, and he cannot understand why he finds this increasingly difficult to accept.

“You look like shit,” chuckles the art professor in his thick, Arabic accent. Will studies the other’s profile from across the table. Egyptian. Young, but acts older than his age. Heavy facial hair. Unruly black curls matching his wayward demeanour. Neither his language nor smoking appears to phase Hannibal who sits beside him in this dim corner of the bar, nursing a glass and watching the younger man with mild amusement. The professor watches Hannibal with narrowed eyes, and Will in turn watches the professor like a hawk through the curling tendrils of cigarette smoke. He wonders how long they have known each other.

“Who’s this guy?”

Hannibal looks across the table at Will when he answers in a tongue that Will does not recognise. The professor makes a noise of understanding. A heavy eyebrow peaking first at Hannibal, then at Will.

“You like it rough?” he asks, smirking. Against his tanned skin, his teeth are very white. Will holds that taunting dark gaze.

“You don’t?” says Will coolly, picking up his drink. The younger man laughs lowly and leans back with his arms resting languidly along the top of the seat, blowing a snaking trail of smoke from his full lips.

“I like it *very* rough,” he states, nodding slowly. “Ask him.”

“I’d rather not,” Will utters, taking a sip of his drink.

“A real trial by fire, this one,” the professor continues to chuckle. “As I’m sure you’ve learnt by now.”

“What do you know about the artist,” says Will, putting down the glass.

“What do you want to know?” says the professor, taking another drag from his cigarette.

Will folds his arms on the table and leans towards them.

“Everything,” he says, with a glance at Hannibal.

++++

Uncomfortable in the professor’s company, and suspecting the other of withholding information from him, Will soon has enough and stands up from the table. Excusing himself, he tells Hannibal he is going back – to whose accommodation, he does not specify – and leaves the bar. On the way, he comes across the same nightclub. The place where Hannibal could have been attacked after Will had left. He goes in, thinking he could learn something of the people who did it. Sees the girl – Melina – at the bar, and goes over.

“Hey,” she greets him without a smile, and he returns the greeting, also without smiling, and orders a drink. When she puts the glass down in front of him, he is about to ask her what happened to Hannibal when she speaks up before he can.

“You should take your friend to the hospital.”

“He is drinking in a bar with someone,” says Will, looking down into his glass as he lifts it to his lips. “He’s fine.”

“I did that too,” she says flatly, her dark eyes staring hard at him. “Carried on as normal. It’s how we cope,” she continues to say with a shrug. “But he needs to get himself checked out if he hasn’t already.”

Will lowers his glass. She glances down at it then back up at Will.

“He hasn’t told you.”

He remains silent, and she licks her lips as though to consider whether or not to tell him. Turning to gather the empty glasses on the bar next to Will, she avoids looking at him.

“Your friend was raped,” she says, and turns away with the glasses.

Chapter End Notes

Translation

“Mano aistringas berniukas” - "My passionate boy"

New Major Character Reference

'The art professor' (image is of Tegan Zayne)

Rūstybė

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Markos grimaces as the man brings his face close. On the other side of the cubicle door, his friends can be heard groaning.

“Look at me.”

The foreigner’s voice is dangerously quiet. Markos watches the blood seeping from the dark hairline and travelling in a slow river towards the other’s eye which continues to stare at him unblinkingly. There is something in those blue eyes which reminds him of the other one. He tries not to shudder.

“Who did it?”

The image of the other man tearing out Yannis’s cheek flashes before him, and Markos impulsively shuts his eyes, but soon opens them again when he feels his interrogator drive the knife into his thigh. Crying out in pain, Markos curses in Greek and leans back against the toilet.

“We all did,” he groans, clutching at his leg. “The bastard deserved it,” he grits through his teeth as he glares at the man. Blood runs into his eye. When he blinks, it looks as though he is shedding a red tear. The man brings his face even closer to Markos’s. Uncomfortable, he turns his face away, but a hand grabs his jaw with bruising force and brings him back round. The stare that awaits him is black.

“When they find you and your friends,” he says. “They will know why from what’s missing.”

“What?” Markos stammers, staring back. “What do you mean?”

The knife twists in his leg and he howls in pain.

“But first.”

Markos whimpers as the knife is yanked out of his leg. He snatches a breath through the nose when he sees the other redirect the sharp point to press into his crotch. Even through the tough fabric of his jeans, he can feel the keen edge of the blade. He starts to sweat.

“Easy-!”

“I’m going to peel you like a piece of fruit.”

“Are you fucking crazy?!”

“Take it out.”

“Fuck you!”

Markos tries to push up and the knife moves to his throat. He holds up his hands.

“Take it out.”

Markos shakes his head, eyes squeezing shut.

“Listen, man,” he starts to ramble, “I’m sorry we beat up your friend, okay? But he gave as good as he got! You’ve seen my boys! Some of them have lost half a fucking face! We were just mad and wanted to get him back, is all. He was the one looking for a fight-”

Blue eyes narrow.

“Is that right.”

“He said some shit about it being a good night for fighting,” says Markos, shaking his head. “If we knew he was going to fight dirty like that, we wouldn’t have touched him, I swear.”

The knife leaves his throat, and Markos puts his hand over it protectively, swallowing. He watches the man turn around and unlock the cubicle door before stepping outside. Slowly, he picks himself off the toilet and staggers after him, exchanging glances with Yannis who is leaning against the tiled wall, cradling his bleeding arm. Yannis in turn looks at Dion, who immediately smashes the beer bottle kept hidden behind his back, and steps after their attacker. With an angry cry, he swings the bottle at the man who sidesteps just in time and turns around from the restroom door. His blue stare bores chillingly into them.

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The door is unlocked. Will pushes his way into the room and walks towards the desk. Putting down the bottle, he takes off his coat and tosses it over the tablet sat on the black surface. Taking the bottle, he slowly lowers himself into the chair with a grunt of pain. With an easy twist, he opens the whisky and lifts it immediately to his lips. The first swallow delivers a good, hard burn. Will pauses to breathe. Then he closes his eyes and knocks it back.

++++

He hears voices outside and puts the empty bottle down on the desk. Getting up, he walks towards the door and opens it to find Hannibal being propped up by the professor. Hooded eyes downcast, but colour in his cheeks. It is clear they have also been drinking.

“Whoa,” the professor begins to laugh. “What happened to you?”

Will steps forward and grabs Hannibal by the front of his shirt. Pulling him from the other and into the room, Will slams the door in the professor’s face before walking Hannibal backwards and shoving him down onto the bed. He falls onto his back with a grunt, tousled strands of hair falling across his lidded eyes which gaze on languidly as Will climbs on top of him.

“You look terrible,” he murmurs amusedly. “Now we match.”

Will slips out and presses the knife against Hannibal’s throat. Hannibal continues to look up at him through his lashes.

“I almost killed some men tonight because of a misunderstanding,” Will utters slowly. Black eyes drift to a close against his stare.

“Why on earth would you do that?” he chuckles lowly, and Will digs the point of the knife into the tender flesh of Hannibal’s scar. Opening his eyes, Hannibal lifts his chin.

“If you’re quick, you’ll be able to catch a flight back in time for the New Year,” he murmurs.

Will stares coolly down at him.

“Did you lie to Melina.”

“Perhaps.”

Will feels his jaw flex, and his fingers clench harder around the handle of the knife.

“Why.”

“I didn’t want to be alone.”

“Tu meluoji,” Will spits before driving the knife into the bed beside Hannibal’s head and pushing off. He storms back to the chair and falls into it, hand running over his face. His head is swimming. Across him, Hannibal laboriously pushes himself up into a sit and then a stand. Clumsily, he begins to undress, taking off his suit jacket, his shirt, unclasping his belt, discarding all his clothes on the floor before making his way to the bathroom. The shower comes on, and Will listens to the roar of the spray, half contemplating going in after Hannibal and strangling him in the stall as the water washes the men’s blood from his hands.

Eventually the water stops and Will can hear the sound of Hannibal’s bare feet on the tiled floor as they travel out of the bathroom towards him. They stop before coming too close. Hand pressed over his eyes, Will listens for further movement. Can feel the other watching him as he stands there.

“Ar apsistojote?”

His voice quiet. Light. Yet heavy with suggestion. Will slowly lowers his hand. Hannibal is stood naked before him, dripping water on the floor. Hair plastered to his skull and over his eyes. There are dark bruises all over his body. Will stares, swallowing despite himself. Hannibal doesn’t say anything, just continues standing there, waiting. Letting Will drink him in with his eyes. Then, with Will still watching, he slowly folds his arms around himself. Tilts his head just enough to be inviting. Lashes low. Turning around, he starts to walk back to the bathroom. Will stands up from the chair. Strides towards Hannibal and tackles him to the floor.

Chest pressing against Hannibal’s back, Will is conscious of the droplets slipping down the groove of his spine to seep through the thin material of his shirt. Pinned beneath him, Hannibal lies prostrate, and does not move even when Will sinks his fingers between his cheeks. Feels their roughened pads gliding over his slippery hole. Biting back a vicious growl, Will suddenly flips Hannibal onto his back and hooks his arms under his legs. He drags him along the floor and against the side of the bed with him until Hannibal is lying upside down with his shoulders pressing against the tile, and the back of his hips leaning against the low bedframe. Standing astride him, Will lets go of his legs and stares down imperiously as he undoes his trousers. Those lidded eyes gaze up at him as he pulls himself free from the confines of his underwear – hard and wet already from the sight of Hannibal lying obediently below him with his arse in the air and his long legs open. Clasping the tops of his thighs, Will pulls him flush against himself, and fists his own cock. Without preamble, he pushes down on his shaft to align his head with Hannibal’s arsehole and immediately begins to press inside. A shaky moan escapes his lips as he starts to sink into that molten grip once more, and, eager to bury himself to the hilt in Hannibal’s heat, Will starts thrusting without giving either of them any time to adjust. Lips pressing together, Hannibal turns his face to the side and closes his eyes.

Gritting his teeth, he proceeds to pile drive Hannibal into the floor. Slams his hips into Hannibal. Slams all the unsaid into him. All the anger. Opening him up to his mercy and delivering none. The sight of the other lying trapped beneath him, flushed in the cheeks, his neck, and collarbone from the awkward position, aching from Will’s punishing cock, from his own bruised skin pressing against the cold tile, feeds a new kind of hunger. It consumes him. A ravenous kind of reckoning that tastes less

of reckoning and more of necessity. Hannibal's body is even tighter than he remembers, and so unbearably *hot*. He'd curse, but only manages another feral growl. There are no words for this. He feels himself coming and gasps suddenly at the sensation of Hannibal's body seizing up to strangle his dick. Barely able to pull from the chokehold, he plunges back in, letting the sweet friction tip him over. Eyes snapping shut, his mouth falls open to an almost pained shout as he feels it exploding out of him with a vengeance.

Panting heavily for his breath, Will slowly opens his eyes to Hannibal's profile. Eyes closed. Lips parted. Chest heaving. Globs of his own semen stuck to his burning cheek, mussed hair, and curling chest hair. His cock, heavy and swollen immediately post-climax, hangs down drooling towards his face. His hands with its raw knuckles are splayed and braced against the floor. They slip and grope weakly for purchase on the tile as Will pulls out brusquely and sees his own come escaping from the gulping pucker of Hannibal's anus. Feels a conflicted mixture of arousal and disgust. Stepping out from between Hannibal and the bed, he turns his back on him and undresses for the shower.

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Stood beneath the spray, Will grits his teeth against his injuries. The cuts he has not seen to. Letting them sting under the water in punishment. He glances up as Hannibal staggers his way towards the sink opposite the shower stall. Watches in the fogged depths of the mirror, his hands planting against the edge of the bowl and his lidded eyes gazing down at the plughole. He reaches for the tap and lets the water run before starting to wash his face. Will lets his eyes roam over the bruises scattered along Hannibal's back. Feels not so much the scorching brand of necessity, now, but regret. The notion that he should perhaps have killed the men for inflicting these injuries despite the reminder that Hannibal is never a victim. A lesson that he was meant to have learnt a very long time ago. For Hannibal was surely bruised then, that very first time, sat in his consulting room as Will arrived with an apology ready on his tongue. And for countless times after that. Yet at some point, without him suspecting, he had started becoming defensive. *Nobody touches him*. Even if he is still mad at him beyond words, and even more so now since Hannibal freely admitted to his manipulation of Melina. Just another victim along the way. No qualms about it. She made an easy mistake buying that lack of self-preservation. Will was a fool for doing so. Again. But even now, with all the frustration of hindsight, Will can't help another niggling question rising to the forefront of his increasingly defensive mind.

"If I hadn't come," he says loudly over the running water. "Would you have done it?"

Hannibal steps back from the sink and leans against the shower stall. Will watches the Verger brand pressing against the glass.

"With Mohamed?"

Will doesn't answer.

"It's nice to feel wanted."

"Is that a yes?" says Will sardonically, looking away.

"Would you have killed him like you killed Daniel?"

"Would you have let me?" Will scoffs.

"A wolf doesn't stop her pup from learning to hunt."

“It knows how to *fucking hunt*,” Will snarls, slamming a fist against the glass and leaving his arm there as he presses his brow against it. Eyes shutting with a clenching of his jaw. A pause as the water continues to roar between them. “If nothing else,” he exhales, voice lost to the spray as his eyes slowly slip open to watch the back of the other’s head. Gradually, Hannibal begins to slide down the glass. At first, Will thinks he is imagining it. Then he hesitantly straightens up and turns off the shower.

“Hey,” he says, but the other has already fallen onto the floor. Opening the stall, Will steps out and looks down at Hannibal slumped over with his eyes closed. Frowning, he starts to walk away. As he reaches the threshold, however, he pauses and looks back over his shoulder. Heaving an inward sigh, he returns to Hannibal’s side and puts his hands on him to help him up. His skin is burning hot. He had not noticed this before. Dragging Hannibal’s arm over his own shoulders, Will walks them back to the bed and drops Hannibal onto the covers. He stands there watching down at him. At the closed eyes and angry colour in his sharp cheekbones.

Goddamnit.

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:
Rūstybė - Wrath
“Tu meluoji” - "You lie"
“Ar apsistojote?” - "Are you staying?"

Fever

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The winter moon casts a cold light across the bed through the glass of the balcony doors. Leaning against the headboard, Will waits for Hannibal to ride out the worst of his temperature. He has lost track of how long he has been watching, but finally those hooded eyes slip open into black slits to gaze up at the ceiling. Spying the water on the bedside table, Hannibal begins to press up with effort and reach for the glass. Fumbling, however, he knocks it over, and Will stops watching to climb off the bed. Pacing round to Hannibal's side, he picks up the glass as the other lowers back down against the bed, and goes to the bathroom. Refilling the glass with cold water, he walks out towards the desk, picks up the chair and brings it over to the bedside.

"Here," he utters, sitting down on the chair and leaning closer with the glass. He waits for Hannibal to drag himself up against the pillows and lift his hand to receive it. His split knuckles still so pink under the blanching moonlight. Will presses the glass into his fingers, but doesn't let go. Slowly, he steers the rim to Hannibal's lips. Watches him gradually swallow down the water then lean his head back against the pillow, eyes closing. The bruised one a dark shade of purple which contrasts starkly with the chilly lighting. Will stops staring and swallows against the strange sensation in the pit of his stomach.

"You stayed," he murmurs.

"You collapsed," states Will.

"I can make it worth your while," says Hannibal, his eyes opening halfway to watch him. Will avoids his gaze, looking down at the hand that starts to push down the cover. Swapping the glass with his other hand, he catches Hannibal's wrist before the cover can travel further down his body.

"I'm not going anywhere," he utters without looking up – to reassure or in warning, he cannot say – before letting go and standing up to get more water.

++++

Staring at the moon through the balcony doors, Will eventually falls asleep on his side. When he opens his eyes, he sees Abigail lying on the bed, facing him. Her throat is cut, and blood as dark as wine is pouring from the gaping wound onto the sheets. Her skin is painfully pale. There is a scared look in her wide staring eyes as she watches him, lips agape but unable to speak. Eyes wavering to the brim, lips trembling, Will reaches out, gathering her to him, his hand on the back of her head. Her hair so soft against his fingers.

"I'm sorry," he whispers into her tresses, voice cracking. "I'm sorry."

"Will?"

Abigail leans her head back in his hand and Will looks down into Molly's face. Eyes lidded, lips parted, she gazes dreamily up at him. The illuminating light of the moon casting an ethereal glow around her blonde head. Beautiful yet cold. Like Melissa.

"Cut me, Will."

The tears have dried up and he sees vividly the spotless, reflective surface of the knife as he brings it to her throat and smoothly cuts it open. Eyes closing with a flickering of fair lashes, Molly silently reaches her orgasm as the knife reaches the other side. Gasping, Will drops it from his hand as he feels her clenching around him and, closing his hands over her gushing neck, he stares at the blood escaping in furious arcs between his fingers as he thrusts into her. Eyes squeezing shut as he presses their brows together.

I'm sorry.

"Does it feel nice?"

He feels the brush of his breath on his lips and leans harder against the skull pressed against his own. Doesn't need to open his eyes to know they are on the backseat of the car. A street in Paris. Snow falling from the branches of the Linden tree outside. His hand burning hot on his thigh. In answer to the question, Will strangles him harder. Ushering forth the angry red torrent. Expelling the air from his throat. The more vehemently he chokes the other, the more he feels the oxygen being forced from his own lungs. He is that close, he cannot breathe.

"We couldn't leave without you."

Blue eyes slip open to behold seething black as he feels the sharp sting of the knife sinking home and dragging him mercilessly to completion.

With a violent gasp, he jerks awake to the brand of a searing hot hand pressing over his scar, and an equally scolding brow pressing between his shoulder blades. Instinct would have him pull away if not for the clutch of fingers around his erection. So unexpectedly lax, and easy to overcome. To overpower. He cannot explain how such a single touch of weakness is capable of inspiring such aggression to spike in his blood like a deep and fatal poison, flooding his senses and taking over until he is not quite himself, yet utterly himself, all at once.

Pushing the hand away, Will throws himself out of bed and stalks to the bathroom. Stood at the sink, he yanks open the cabinet and snatches both the bottle and rubber ring he finds there before striding back to the bed. Slamming the bottle down on the bedside table, he tugs the cover off Hannibal, tugs off his own shorts, and climbs back on the bed as the other continues to lie on his side with his eyes closed. Wrapping his arms around Hannibal's waist, Will drags him across the sheets against himself until he can easily reach onehanded for the bottle and pushes forcefully on the pump to empty a generous amount of the cold, translucent gunk into the palm of his hand. Slathering himself with a shudder, he hooks an arm under Hannibal's leg and pulls back to spread his thighs. Taking himself in hand, he pushes into that tight but yielding ring of muscle, spurred on by the lack of resistance as he presses deep. With a few sharp, snapping motions from his hips, Will buries himself to the root inside Hannibal. Squeezing shut his eyes, he grunts as he begins to move, and immediately the lubrication proves inadequate as it is forced back out of Hannibal by the frantically rubbing sides of his thickly-veined shaft. But he doesn't stop. His prick striving impatiently to adjust to the heat again. So unbelievably hot. As though he is breeding with hellfire itself. And he becomes aware of Hannibal's silence - a sudden affront to Will that makes him respond with a deep growl as he digs his fingers into his bruises, pressing until his ears fill greedily with Hannibal's tantalisingly hushed and secretive utterances of pain.

Belatedly remembering the cock ring in his hand, Will shoves it against Hannibal's rapidly growing head until it rolls over the thickening ridge like a choking collar. Rolls it roughly down the swelling sides of the other's shaft until he must use both hands to stretch it over his balls before letting go so the rubber cinches snugly around the base. Adrenaline pounding in his ears, he pulls out and pushes Hannibal onto his back. His eyes are closed, most likely with fatigue. No challenge. No resistance.

Lying there placid and unable to defend himself. Emboldened by this, Will plants his hands against the silken insides of Hannibal's thighs and presses them open before leaning in. Rigid flesh gliding into his passage as smooth as wading back into the stream. He braces his hands to either side of Hannibal's head and leans up on his arms. Slowly, he starts to pull out before slamming back in. Staring down through narrowed eyes at the scar in Hannibal's neck, he wraps his hands around his throat. Black slits slip open, watching him from under fair lashes. Jaw tensing, Will stares back as he chokes him. Squeezes his throat until Hannibal is squeezing back, his walls closing in on him and making Will groan in pleasure as he strangles him harder, refusing to admit defeat. Soon, those black eyes slip to a close, and as Hannibal passes out, Will feels his inhibitions plunge like their bodies into the sea. He thrusts brutally into him, his tight, heavy balls straining against the other's stretched arsehole and slapping relentlessly into him. He fucks Hannibal until the top of his head smacks against the headboard, and, shuddering convulsively, he finally comes with a harsh cry, entire body tensing as his release rips through him as though with claws. Just when he thinks he has finished ejaculating, the deep spasm continues until he has emptied himself dry, and is whimpering from oversensitivity.

As he pants for his breath like he's in danger of drowning, he leans his face down to check Hannibal's breathing. Feeling his breath blowing faint but steady against his cheek, Will exhales and slowly starts to pull out. Whilst he wouldn't consider himself a voyeur, he doesn't look away neither when his softening cock slips out of Hannibal, unplugging the heavy load of his cum so it oozes freely from his hole. Eventually, Will averts his eyes as he tugs the cover over them and lies down on his side, facing the balcony. The adrenaline that had fuelled him from waking has now faded, yet he can't quite quell the pounding in his chest. Suspects it could somehow be calmed by Hannibal waking and arguing with him. Fighting him. Making physical contact. And in doing so, touching him. Head starting to pound, Will squeezes shut his eyes and wraps his arms around himself, his spent body curling up defensively as he hopes for even just a couple of hours freed from the perpetual agony of guilt, fear, and unspeakable desire.

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The pain returns first upon waking. And the heat. Every part of him burning and hurting, especially his anus. When he opens his eyes, the room is dim with the blue light of dawn, and a warm body is tucked against his back with an arm slung over his side - a hand clasped around his throat. Realising he is also painfully hard, he slowly lowers his hand and feels his fingers brushing against pubic hair and rubber at the root of his penis. Wrapping a loose fist around himself, he slowly starts to move his hand, but the weariness plaguing the muscles in his arm soon stops him, and he lies there uncomfortably, sweating, aching. Throbbing. The hand lets go of his throat and travels down to seize his dick, stroking him until he's close to coming. And stopping before he does. Chest gently heaving, Hannibal catches his breath just as the hand picks up again, squeezing him tight and stopping just before he goes over the edge. This continues for what feels like hours until the pulsations are almost painful, and he can feel the precum trickling freely from the sensitive head of his cock. Turning his face towards his captor, he breathes in deeply and releases a shaky sigh. Fingers curling in the sheets.

"Prašau," he murmurs with his eyes closed.

"Prašau ką," the voice murmurs back behind his ear.

Hannibal licks his parched lips.

"Nenustokite…"

"Ne?"

The hand gives him a cruel squeeze.

“N-ne,” he grunts, breath catching in his throat.

“Ar tai gerai?” the voice asks, quiet and low. Taunting in tone. His breath stroking the shell of his ear. His hand stroking him just right.

“Taip,” Hannibal gasps, spine arching.

“Like this?” the voice murmurs as the hand moves faster. Hannibal closes his eyes, panting as he feels himself thickening and preparing to shoot. But again, the stroke ends before he can, and, denied release, he sags breathless and exhausted against the body behind him. Against something trapped.

“Sometimes,” utters the voice darkly into his ear, “this is what it feels like being with you.”

Before he can reply, Hannibal feels himself being pushed over onto his stomach and his legs being forced up against the sheets on either side of him, exposing his entrance. Hands grab and roughly spread his arse cheeks, opening him to the blunt end of a girthy head. It presses damply against him - the slick of excitement - but not enough for a smooth entry. He feels hands grabbing his biceps, and weight leaning heavily into those hands. Testing the other’s determination, he clenches against the invasion and digs his brow into the bed as he feels himself being slowly but surely cleaved in two, holding his breath as he is penetrated so utterly, he can feel their combined pulses when his cock reaches its fill inside of him and stops. As the backs of his thighs meet the tops of the other’s, and their bodies are joined without a hairline between them, Hannibal remembers to breathe, and just as quickly feels the air being forced from his lungs as the first thrust shoves his face into the pillow, and the next pins him to its plush depths - the following muffling each of his pained utterances and suffocating him with the blast of his own heated breaths. Mustering whatever remaining energy he has, Hannibal drags his face out of the pillow. Breathing hard, he looks back over his shoulder at the cut bridge of his nose. The bruised cheek and parted lips. That scar. Looks up helplessly into those savage blue eyes.

“Prašau, Will,” he pants. “Skauda.”

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Staring at the grimace on Hannibal’s face, and savouring the pleading tone of his voice, Will reaches round for his cock. Tugs on it furiously as he chases his own climax and finally finds release. Shaft straining against Will’s fingers, Hannibal also pumps his seed all over the bed, the pulsations continuing long and hard as Will drops his sweating brow between Hannibal’s shoulder blades, and lies there on top of him, catching his breath. The post orgasm shudders running through their tired bodies. Slowly lifting his face, Will looks for Hannibal and finds his eyes closed. Pulling up carefully, he watches down at the other’s exhausted profile lying against the pillow, and recognises this to be one of the rarer times he can be confident Hannibal is not pretending. After a pause, he slips his hand onto Hannibal’s brow. Says nothing as he watches the other’s sleeping face.

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He is woken up by knocking on the door. The room is too bright. Dragging himself out of bed, he picks up and tugs on his shorts before trudging towards the offending sound, his head still pounding. Opening it mid-knock, he stares with half-closed eyes at the face of the Egyptian who lofts his dark eyebrows as he gives Will a quick once-over.

“Rough night?” he asks smilingly, the sneering shape of his lips not lost to the dark depths of his groomed beard. Planting his hand on the door, he leans forward to peer past Will into the room. He smells of an exotic aftershave Will does not recognise. “Is he dead?” he adds amusedly, pushing past Will’s arm and striding into the room to stand with his hands on his hips. Wearing a casually smart and fitted three-piece that hugs his trim figure, the man makes Will feel exceptionally underdressed. Closing the door, he watches the other hitching up the tight legs of his tailored trousers and squatting down at the bedside to study the snoozing occupant. “He looks even worse than I remember,” he says, pinning Will with his large, incredulous eyes before they narrow with a frown. “Good job.”

“He’s ill,” Will utters, putting on Hannibal’s dressing gown to feel less exposed to the shrewd scrutiny of the other’s dark eyes. Tying the sash, he glances over to see Mohamed with his face lowered to Hannibal’s.

“Are you feeling unwell, Dr Lecter?”

Will says nothing as the other tilts his head as though listening for an answer.

“Tell me where it hurts.”

Closing his eyes to the professor’s smirk, Will lifts his hand to massage his temples.

“Do you have further information on the artist?” he asks and hears the quiet rustle of the other straightening up. Lowers his hand as those expensive shoes click towards him.

“Of course,” answers Mohamed offhandedly, walking past him to the desk. “But first,” he says, picking up the empty whisky bottle and giving Will a knowing look. “We must eat.” Putting down the bottle, he stands opposite Will, smoothing down his cashmere scarf as he casts a measuring eye over him one more time. “Meet me at The Blue Cup when you’re ready,” he instructs, slapping his hand on Will’s shoulder as he paces to the door. Helping himself out, he holds the door open behind him. “I’m a patient man,” he adds, looking at Will. “But no fucking, please.” Another grin and the door shuts. Will wonders if he could murder the Egyptian, finish a strong coffee, and return to the room before Hannibal wakes.

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

“Prašau” - "Please"
“Prašau ką” - "Please what"
“Nenustokite” - "Don't stop"
“Ne?" - "No?"
“Ar tai gerai?” - "Does it feel good?"
“Taip” - "Yes"
"Skauda" - "It hurts"

Invitation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The café is mostly empty when Will enters. Glancing around the interior of dark exposed brickwork and light steel beams, he sees Mohamed sat at the end of the bench table running the length of the room. The white haze of his cigarette smoke battling with the morning light coming in through the tall windows and illuminating polished wood surfaces. The barista continues to converse leisurely with the two young men – students, perhaps - perched on the hard, uncomfortable-looking stools lining the bar, their rucksacks left on the seats beside them. Approaching the Egyptian, Will sits down across from him at the table.

“I figured he wouldn’t be coming,” says Mohamed without looking up from the menu in his hand, cigarette in the other. “Which is all for the best, considering he wouldn’t last a second in these fucking hard chairs,” he continues to murmur as he takes a drag from the cigarette and exhales a white flurry from his lips. “Style over substance.”

“You have information,” Will utters, and dark eyes meet his, one heavy eyebrow lofting.

“Do we have our fucking coffee yet?” he asks, leaning back in the barstool to give Will a onceover through narrowing eyes. “I thought he ate the rude.”

Will holds that scrutinising gaze.

“So did I,” he says.

“You consider me rude,” Mohamed chuckles lowly.

“On the spectrum.”

“And where do you sit on the spectrum?” he asks with a casual tilt of his head.

“Where do you think.”

Mohamed doesn’t answer as he continues to study Will. Plume of smoke curling and twisting into the air from the end of his cigarette. The barista comes over.

“Two Arabian pita pies?”

“Thank you,” replies Mohamed without looking, and the man puts the plates down in front of them.

“I took the liberty of ordering for you,” he says when the barista has left. “I hope you don’t consider that rude,” he adds drily, brows lofting as he moves the cigarette towards his lips. “Are you scared he’s going to die on you? Is that why you’re in such a hurry to get back?”

The barista returns.

“Two syphon coffees.”

Mohamed mutters another perfunctory thanks to the man and Will glances down at the dark contents of the blue porcelain cup placed before him. The strong, almost spicy notes of the coffee invading his

nostrils. The barista is already walking back to the bar.

“This chair is uncomfortable,” Will answers, maintaining eye contact as he picks up the cup and takes a small sip of the heady brew. Swallowing, he licks his lips, adding, “I don’t plan on staying any longer than I need to.”

“Yes, well,” snorts Mohamed, picking up his coffee, “I believe the expression you Americans use is no shit, Sherlock.” Chuckling to himself, he takes a sip of the coffee. “Why don’t you relax and stop acting like you have a cock up your arse.” A shrewd smile curls his lips. “Speaking of. How did you manage it, exactly?”

Will watches on impassively as Mohamed takes another slow sip from his cup.

“Did you restrain him? Drug him? Both?” he continues to ask. “Do please tell me the secret to forcing submission from a man who despises the idea of homosexual penetration.” Another smile and an innocent blink from those large brown eyes.

“Why don’t you ask him yourself,” replies Will coolly despite feeling the first ripple of discomfort triggered by the other’s words. But he’d spoken just a touch too fast, and a lopsided smile appears on Mohamed’s lips.

“Oh, I will,” he states, sipping from the cup as he continues to stare at Will. For a moment, neither says anything as they break eye contact to drink the coffee and eat the food. Then, Mohamed rubs his fingertips together and picks up a napkin to dab his mouth and stroke over his carefully groomed beard. “Now,” he announces, reaching for something on the chair beside him. “Business.” He slides a large brown envelope across the table. Will picks it up and puts it down on the seat beside him.

“Also,” he says, reaching into his suit jacket and pulling out a smaller envelope. “Please make sure he sees this.”

Will looks down at the dark red envelope in an intricately embossed pattern.

“The other contains photos of the artist’s work, if we are to continue referring to the killer as the artist,” says Mohamed with a casual lofting of his brows. “They come attached with notes, in case you really can’t hang around. I won’t waste my time or yours asking what you do and do not know. I do, however, have a question.”

Lifting his eyes from the decorative envelope, Will meets the Egyptian’s stare.

“What were you so busy with that you didn’t look into this yourselves?”

Enjoying a certain satisfaction that comes with being partial to information that a disliked acquaintance is not, Will finishes his coffee and stands up from the table.

“I guess you two have a lot to catch up on,” he says lightly, brows lofting as he turns to leave. “Thank you for breakfast.”

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Closing the door behind him, Will walks over to the desk and puts down the hot carton and plastic bag with a quiet rustling. Looking over to the bed as he removes his coat, he sees Hannibal lying with his head in the pillow still. Eyes closed. His cheeks no longer as flushed. Returning his attention to the bag, he takes out the small bottle of orange juice with the packet of ibuprofen and picks up the carton

before pacing over to the chair. Lowering himself into it, he keeps the carton and deposits the rest on the bedside table. The note he left Hannibal looks untouched. *Back soon*.

“You smell of cigarettes.”

At the hushed murmur of his voice, Will looks down to watch hooded eyes slip open and blink slowly against the brightness of the room.

“Too bright?”

“No.”

“How are you feeling?”

“Hungry,” Hannibal answers, eyes falling on the carton between Will’s hands.

“Good,” says Will, removing the lid and detaching the spoon. Hannibal glances at the bedside table. He reaches for the juice and knocks it off the edge. Catching it with a hand, Will puts the carton down on the table and twists open the lid of the juice. Leaning closer, he holds the bottle towards Hannibal.

“Can you sit up?”

Slowly, Hannibal pushes himself up into a slouched sit against the pillow. His grimace does not go unnoticed, and Will leans across him to grab and slot his pillow behind the other’s. Hannibal reclines against the extra support with a quiet exhale, eyes lidding at the bottle Will holds out to him.

“Here…” he utters, moving it closer until Hannibal opens his mouth enough for the plastic rim to press against his bottom lip and for Will to start gently tipping the bottle. His eyes fall to the undulations in Hannibal’s throat as he swallows, the scar so pale and tender-looking in the morning light. It’s a wonder it hadn’t ruptured under his hands. When Hannibal has emptied the bottle, Will sets it aside and picks up the carton and spoon. Holding the hot carton in a hand, he dips the spoon into the steaming contents and lifts it to his lips. Blowing on it, he gradually leans in again, and Hannibal parts his lips to receive the spoon, dark eyes lifting to watch him. Will meets his gaze without speaking and continues to feed him the broth until that stare becomes too much, and he drops his eyes to the cut in his mouth. Eventually glancing away completely when he catches himself watching Hannibal lick his lips too closely.

“Is that enough?” he asks once the other has finished.

“Yes, thank you,” replies Hannibal quietly, watching him still. Will can’t help looking his way again, but avoids meeting the other directly in the eye. Watches the boundaries of his bruise, instead. Thinks it is already starting to fade. Or maybe it’s the lighting in the room. He has a sudden urge to let go of the spoon and reach over and trace with his fingertips the hollow of his eye socket and that sharp, ruthless edge where brow merges with cheekbone. Touching the delicate skin there and pressing with increasing pressure until those lips pull back twitchingly from teeth in a silent snarl.

“What did he have to say?” asks Hannibal, and Will stops staring to stand up and take the rubbish over to the bin by the desk.

“Not much,” he answers, pulling the brown envelope from the bag.

“That doesn’t sound like Mohamed.”

“Nothing too constructive,” Will adds, returning to the chair and sitting down. *Tell me the secret to forcing submission from a man who despises the idea of homosexual penetration*. Pushing aside the other’s voice, he opens the envelope and starts pulling out its contents. Hannibal watches as Will starts spreading the photos out on the bed in front of him, each one printed on good quality paper and resembling postcards you’d expect to pick up from the gift shop of a modern art gallery. Each one more or less identical to what Jack had shown him that night in Molly’s kitchen.

“Four in total,” states Will. “Five including your own.”

He glances briefly at said fifth photo before referring to the notes accompanying the images.

“The first was discovered in Budapest,” he reads, and sees dark eyes drifting towards the first photograph. “A lion’s head and a human foot severed at the ankle. Pomegranate seeds were discovered inside the lion’s jaws. The lion was identified as belonging to the Budapest zoo. No ID for the foot.”

Will pauses at the italics indicating Mohamed’s musings before continuing.

“The composition-”

“Resembles that used by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in his sculpture of Daniel,” Hannibal interrupts with a hushed voice, eyes lidded in thought. “As can be seen by the placing of the lion’s tongue so it appears to be licking the foot.”

The explanation matches the notes in his hands, as Will expects. Hannibal would have completed his research before making the decision to respond to the killer with his own tribute to the Baroque sculptor. Unlike the professor, however, Will is privy to one of the driving factors behind this decision. He was the one who had caused it, after all. A certain degree of emotional distress, most likely unexpected, which explains the vehemence of his reaction. Anger, mostly. From being hurt. From allowing himself to be hurt. As much as the other would never openly admit. Watching that pensive expression on Hannibal’s face, Will speculates on the moment their way of living – their precarious, provisional post-fall arrangement – may have crossed Hannibal’s mind at the same time he gave in to his inclinations. Wants to know how quickly it was spurned, and whether Hannibal could want to return to whatever it was they had. He drops his eyes to the text in his hands, afraid of the other suddenly looking over to read into his stare.

“The next two continue the preoccupation with Bernini,” he reads off the text. “The sling from David, crafted from human intestine, possibly sourced from the same body as the foot. The stone replaced by a pomegranate. A preoccupation with the fruit’s symbolism of life and death, and, perhaps most importantly for the perpetrator, the act of returning.”

Pausing, Will wonders at the timing of those last words.

“Don’t you know all this already?” he asks, glancing up. “Did I even need to meet him?”

“Did you get a free breakfast?” Hannibal asks in return, head tilting gently in the pillow.

“…yes.”

“What did you have?”

“An Arabian pita pie and a syphon coffee.”

“Was it nice?”

“I wasn’t really hungry.”

“Did he choose the soup?”

“I did.”

“Ah.”

Pause.

“Was it nice?” Will asks in casual mimicry, brows lofting at the other.

“I was hungry,” Hannibal answers, a smile on his lips as his half drawn eyes lower to the photos. Will also returns his attention to the photos. Finds it difficult not to be affected by that smile.

“Romai beach,” says Hannibal, and Will checks the notes.

“Simultaneous to the discovery of the sling,” he reads, “a student notifies the police of a severed man’s head left on Romai beach.”

“The lips wrapped around the apex of the spire on a large conch,” explains Hannibal. “A small pomegranate distending the cheek from the inside, creating the illusion of air being blown into the shell.”

“Tongue missing,” Will adds. “Suggestive of a preoccupation with trophies.”

“Correct,” says Hannibal, and Will glances up to find the other smiling as he gives Will a thoughtful onceover. He parts his lips, then hesitates as though thinking better of it, lidded eyes travelling askance. “A trophy was also taken from the next victim,” he says instead, hooded eyes falling back to the photos. “Assuming the three instances in Budapest stemmed from the same body.”

“The girl was discovered in Prague,” states Will. “An arrow piercing her chest, straight through a pomegranate placed where her heart should be.”

“Her body arranged in the style of Bernini’s Saint Teresa,” adds Hannibal.

“Down to the euphoric expression on her face.”

“Yet no traces of narcotics being used,” muses Hannibal aloud.

“He likes Bernini,” says Will. “And pomegranates.” He pauses. “Did you…take any trophies?” he asks, voice quiet.

“No.”

He glances up to see Hannibal looking down at the photo of his own murder.

That’s a yes.

“Care to read Mohamed’s notes for this one?” he asks, and Will looks over the text in his hands.

“Two headless torsos discovered in Rome,” he begins to read. “Arranged in the composition of Bernini’s Rape of Proserpina with specific tribute paid to the hands of Pluto. Untaken opportunity to respond to the use of animals with the missing Cerberus. Is that because…” Will stops reading,

eyebrows drawing despite himself. He senses Hannibal waiting and continues hesitantly. "…your boyfriend likes dogs."

He pauses.

"No presence of pomegranates," he continues to read. "Although plenty of seed…" Will stops reading again and looks up to see Hannibal's expectant, inquisitive expression. His own speaking volumes of *I'm not reading that*.

"Finish the sentence," insists Hannibal innocently.

"No," Will utters, standing up and tossing the envelope and notes down onto the bed before stalking back to the desk.

"Is that all?" asks Hannibal.

"I wish," Will mutters under his breath as he picks up his coat and removes the red envelope. He looks over at Hannibal.

"Ah," he says, eyes falling to the envelope in his hand. Will does not like the expectant tone of his voice.

"What is it," he asks, perhaps a touch too sullenly.

"Why don't you open it."

"It's addressed to you," Will answers, pacing back to the bed and tossing the envelope into Hannibal's lap before crossing his arms. "Wouldn't want to be rude."

"Very well," says Hannibal, glancing up at Will before lowering his gaze to study the heavily embossed paper, an elaborate symbol of occasion. Turning it over, he breaks the seal imprinted with a symbol Will is not familiar with, and pulls out the first of its contents. Stood by the edge of the bed, Will looks down at the photo and what appears to be a pair of hands – female – with thin leafy branches as fingers. Or protruding from between. Each branch has been carefully, perhaps painstakingly embedded into the skin, and some appear to have been grafted deep inside the digits to give the illusion of metamorphosis. If not for the murderous reality of the composition, one would be tempted to say it was rather beautiful.

"Daphne," says Will in recognition.

"Yes."

"No Apollo."

"No."

Will watches Hannibal study the photo with a tilt of his head. The expression on his face one of mild admiration.

"He responded," says Will, voice quiet.

"He has," replies Hannibal. "Assuming it's a he."

There is something else in the envelope. Will waits for Hannibal to extract it. A stiff card in the same dark red colour, embossed at the top with an intricate gold pattern of tessellating shapes. A distinctly Middle Eastern design.

“It’s an invitation,” says Hannibal.

“To what?” asks Will.

“Mohamed’s wedding.”

“He’s getting married?” Will asks, failing to mask the faint note of disgust that has managed to creep into his voice.

“That is what weddings generally tend to be about.”

“Are they linked?” Will asks, ignoring the other’s sarcasm. “The wedding and the murders.”

“He says there is somebody he’d like me to meet,” explains Hannibal, his eyes reading something on the card. “One would suspect said guest could have links to the artist.”

“Could just be a wild goose chase,” Will mutters, looking over to the balcony with his arms still folded.

“Do I need to find myself another plus one?”

Will looks back at Hannibal.

“Your name is on the invite,” he says, as way of explaining. “It would be-”

“Rude not to attend,” Will finishes woodenly for him. He stands there, watching Hannibal without enthusiasm.

“I could ask someone else if you’re so against it,” offers Hannibal, idly turning the card over to check the back. “A hijab would suit her better, I suppose. But nobody would know the difference if you turned up in a burka.”

Will is ready to retort when a knocking at the door stops him. Tearing his eyes from Hannibal’s infuriatingly polite smile, he paces over to the door. Their visitor barely gives him the chance to pull open the door fully before he’s already striding into the room with an impatient click of his shoes.

“Al-salāmu ʿalaykum,” Mohamed exclaims jovially, pausing at the foot of the bed with his hands on his hips. “I see you have received my invitation,” he says, grinning charmingly at Hannibal. “Just wanted to be sure you did,” he adds, glancing back at Will who is still stood with the door open in a hand, looking like he’s waiting for the Egyptian to depart as quickly as he’d arrived.

“Thank you for the invitation,” says Hannibal. “We look forward to coming.”

“And I look forward to you coming,” replies Mohamed with a gracious nod. “Perhaps if you arrive a little earlier, I can have my personal tailor see to your needs.”

“Sounds perfect,” says Hannibal with a smile. The door closes noisily. Both pairs of eyes look towards Will. Stood with his arms folded across his chest as he begins to pace towards the professor.

“So who’s the mystery guest?” he asks casually, head tilting as he gives the Egyptian a slow onceover.

“Why, you certainly would be considered one,” Mohamed answers promptly, his voice low. His Arabic accent rolling smoothly off his tongue. “That is,” he adds, words trailing off and reminding Will of a serpent, “if you’re definitely coming.”

For a moment, neither of them say anything as they stand there attempting to stare the other down. Then, as though snapping himself out of a trance, Mohamed turns his face towards Hannibal.

“Before I go to catch my flight, there is just one more thing,” he announces, and walks over to the bedside. Will watches Mohamed slip his hand into his suit jacket and takes a step after him, stopping himself when he sees the other pulling out a mobile phone. Sitting down on the edge of the bed, Mohamed leans in until his arm is pressing familiarly against Hannibal’s. His fingers trip across the phone screen as he murmurs something under his breath in a different language. Finally they move out of the away as he appears to have found what he was looking for, allowing Hannibal to cast his scrutinising eye over what’s being shown. Mohamed watches Hannibal. Will watches Mohamed.

“That is them, yes?” he asks.

“Yes,” replies Hannibal, head tilting at the phone.

“Good,” Mohamed exclaims briskly, suddenly sliding his arm around Hannibal and pressing closer. “Now how about a selfie,” he suggests lowly.

“How about you leave,” Will utters, voice dangerously quiet.

Hannibal reaches down to take Mohamed’s hand and politely steer it above the cover.

“Maybe when I look less like shit,” he says in echo of the other's rudeness, smiling at the Egyptian. Placated by Hannibal’s charm, Mohamed shrugs.

“I like the rough and ready look on you,” he says offhandedly, slipping the phone back inside his suit jacket and straightening himself out as he stands. Adjusting his cashmere scarf, he walks past Will on his way to the door.

“Have fun,” he says graciously as he faces them in farewell. “I shall be seeing you soon.” He looks from Hannibal to Will and smiles. “Ilá al-liqā.”

“Ilá al-liqā,” says Hannibal in return, and they watch as the professor helps himself out.

When the door closes, Will goes over to lock it before walking back to the desk. He looks in the plastic bag and takes out another small bottle of juice, suddenly wishing he’d picked up something stronger.

“May I have a drink?”

Removing another bottle from the bag, Will turns around and paces back over to the bedside. Twisting the lid off one of the bottles, he holds it out to the other. Hannibal lifts a hand to take it. His fingertips brushing over Will’s.

“Sit down,” he says quietly. “I want to show you something.”

Waiting until Hannibal is holding the bottle without dropping it, Will pulls his hand away and lowers himself into the chair by the bed.

“What was on the phone?” Will asks, eyes on the lid of the bottle in his hand as he starts to twist it open.

“Photos,” answers Hannibal. “Of the men.”

Will removes the lid.

“From the club,” he utters without looking up.

“Yes.”

“Did he kill them.”

“He did.”

Bastard. Will pauses for a moment longer before lifting the juice to his lips. Taking long, deep gulps until he has completely drained the bottle. Exhaling, he wipes his mouth on the back of his hand. It still aches from where Hannibal had stabbed him with the knife. As does another part of him.

“I should have done it,” he murmurs eventually, voice so low and quiet it is barely audible. He feels eyes on him, but doesn’t look up.

“Why?”

“For touching you.”

The smallest of pauses.

“Why.”

“I don’t…” Will begins to say before pausing to lick his lips, hands rolling the bottle distractedly between his palms. “…want anybody to touch you.” Uncomfortable with what he just admitted out loud, he screws the lid back onto the bottle and throws it with some force at the bin. It hits the desk and bounces off out of sight.

“I want to show you something.”

“What.”

“Bring me the tablet.”

Will turns his face away.

“I don’t want to watch that right now.”

“I think you’ll enjoy this more.”

Will glances over from the corners of his eyes to find Hannibal watching him in earnest. Or a damned good imitation of. Either way, it makes that hard knot in his chest relent, as much as he hates to admit.

“Aš pažadu.”

Will drops his eyes to the floor.

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep,” he utters quietly.

“How do you know I won’t?” says Hannibal. Voice soft. Will feels the knot unfurling. *Damn him*.

Slowly, he gets up from the chair and fetches the tablet from the desk. He brings it back to the other.

“Sit down.”

He sits down on the edge of the bed, their bodies touching through the cover.

“There’s a new app on the tablet,” says Hannibal. “It’s blue. Can you find it?”

Will touches the screen. Searches for the app.

“Yes.”

“Open it.”

Will does as he is told. A window opens onto a familiar looking living room. The same rustic furniture that belongs to the elderly couple Hannibal had befriended.

“Is this…” he begins to utter, when a large black shape trots into view. Hannibal leans closer.

“Here boy,” he calls, and Will smiles when he sees the dog freeze and look curiously towards them. “Where’s daddy?” Hannibal continues to say. “Can you see him?”

The dog barks and Will laughs softly.

“When did you install this?”

“Call him.”

“Hey boy,” says Will. The dog barks excitedly again at the sound of his voice and runs straight up to the camera. His flaring nostrils fogging up the glass. Laughing quietly, Will feels his eyes lidding at the screen. “I miss you too.”

“You can check on him any time you like,” says Hannibal.

“Thanks…”

Climbing onto the bed, Will gradually leans back against the headboard. In his peripheral vision, he sees Hannibal slowly lifting the bottle of juice. Sipping from it a little at a time as Will returns his attention to the tablet and proceeds to have a one-sided conversation with the dog. After a while, he just lies there, watching the app without saying anything. Listening to the hushed sounds of the dog reaching them from hundreds of miles away. The quiet breathing at his side.

“Where is it,” he asks eventually, voice quiet.

“Dubai.”

Will hums noncommittally. Suddenly tired, he lets his head drop hesitantly onto the shoulder beside him. Doesn’t protest when he feels a faint stirring in his curls as Hannibal presses his nose into his hair and takes a slow inhale.

“…I’ll go.”

“It will be mild this time of the year,” Hannibal exhales into his tresses, breath a warm caress against his scalp. “Tau patiks.”

Eyes closing, Will releases the breath he wasn’t aware he had been holding.

“I’d better,” he sighs. “Or I’m going home.” *We could go together.*

“Jūs jau esate namuose,” Hannibal murmurs. “Tu esi su manimi.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

“Al-salāmu ʿalaykum” - "Peace be upon you"
“Ilá al-liqā” - "Until next time"
“Aš pažadu” - "I promise"
“Tau patiks” - "You will like it"
“Jūs jau esate namuose” - "You are already at home"
“Tu esi su manimi” - "You are with me"

Bistecca alla Fiorentinna

He feels the weight on his shoulder lifting as Will shifts uncomfortably – ever his reaction, it would seem, to potential intimacy - and turns away to lie down on his side. Leaving him to rest, Hannibal slowly climbs out of bed, glad to find that despite the lingering ache of his body, he is not too unsteady on his feet. Shuffling to the bathroom, he perches on the edge of the bath with a grimace and leans over to turn on the tap. Closing his eyes, he listens to the sound of water filling up the empty space and building in volume and density until he can hear echoes of their submerged limbs struggling in the depths of the sea, and recall the sensation of fingers pulling desperately on his top. The sign that Will Graham had changed his mind and graciously decided to let them live. Of course, he should have known Hannibal would never have permitted their destruction. Especially not whilst victory pounded pure and raw in their veins, their very minds elevated by the sheer excitement of potential reconciliation. The former, he would speak confidently for the both of them. Perhaps even the latter. But the cold to follow immediately was experienced alone. He felt it for as long as it took their bodies to hit the water. He knew, even as he went over, that it was always a possibility. It should not have been a surprise. He had fallen for it many a times. Just not from such a height. No. The real surprise was how he had allowed it to cause him pain. Allows it to cause him pain even now, when he allows himself to think about it. Then he remembers, self-beratingly. The arrow shot causes only destruction. Steam tickles his skin, and he opens his eyes with resolution. *So be it*.

++++

The aching of his bladder pulls him out of his sleep. Opening his eyes, he finds himself alone on the bed, and pushes up into a sit. The tablet is lying on top of the cover with the app still running but nobody in view. Reaching down, he closes it and stands up before trudging his way to the bathroom. As he approaches the open doorway, he is greeted by a humid waft of steam and, stepping over the threshold, he sees Hannibal climbing unsteadily out of the bath, his hooded eyes downcast and arms hanging limp. As he starts to fall, Will instinctively lunges over to catch him, arms wrapping around his burning wet torso, his eyes moving to the body of steaming water behind him. *Too hot*.

“I’m hungry,” says Hannibal, hands grasping Will’s arms as he pushes against them to stand upright. His hair dripping water down his face to catch on his lashes and lips. “Let’s have lunch.”

“Sit down first,” Will begins to utter, but the other is already dragging himself back out into the bedroom. Driven by the pressure building in his bladder, Will quickly relieves himself and washes his hands, then face, in the sink before stepping out. Finds Hannibal stood naked and semi dry in front of the wardrobe, one hand holding on to the door whilst the other skirts along the row of hangers laden with coordinates. A damp towel discarded on the floor by his feet.

“I know of a place that critics have spoken favourably of,” he says as Will’s eyes continue to roam his skin from bruise to bruise as though connecting points on a dot to dot picture.

“Tell me where,” he says, arms folding. “I’ll get a takeout.”

“I don’t believe they offer that option,” replies Hannibal, lifting out a shirt.

“I’ll check.”

“I already have.”

“I’m getting a takeout,” Will states firmly, and Hannibal turns from the wardrobe, shirt held against his body.

“We’re going out,” Hannibal declares, unperturbed by Will’s flat expression and removing the hanger to begin slowly pulling the shirt up his arms.

“No,” Will utters lowly, pacing over. Stopping in front of him, Will grabs either end of the stiff shirt collar. “I am,” he says, yanking down the garment. Hannibal glances down at his bared shoulders.

“Is that an order?” he asks amusedly, and Will tugs the shirt off completely.

“Yes,” he answers, keeping his eyes on Hannibal’s face in their close proximity. “So sit down,” he commands.

Black eyes comb over him, never failing to make him bristle and feel exposed despite standing there fully clothed. Arms tucking behind him, Hannibal leans back against the wardrobe door. Naked body arching as he stretches languidly with a sigh of compliance. Eyes lidded.

“Where.”

Turning from Hannibal, Will balls up and chucks the shirt back at him.

“You look a little warm under the collar, Will,” he says behind him, “I hope you are not catching ill.”

“If I am,” says Will, throwing the other a look over his shoulder, “I’ll have your skin.”

“Do you speak to all the cannibals like that?”

That smile.

“…sit your sick arse down.”

++++

Stood behind a young foreign couple as he waits to be served, Will casts his eye over the dark green and black bottles lining the exposed brick wall on floating shelves and sturdy wine racks. He has done his own research, and has read the reviews. The most extensive wine list in Thessaloniki. Some of the most exceptional cuts of meat. Granted, not the sort Hannibal craves, but even he can’t say no to a melt in the mouth bistecca alla Fiorentinna. Something touches his arm and he turns his face to find Melina stood at his side.

“Sorry,” she says, removing her hand and tucking a strand of dark hair behind her ear. “I was calling you but you seemed distracted.” Will suddenly remembers Hannibal introducing him to the other as Thomas.

“Hey,” he utters, for want of something better to say.

“I didn’t think I would bump into you again, so thought to say hi when I saw you just now,” she explains, hands tucking into the back pockets of her jeans. “Where is John?”

“Resting.”

“Oh,” she says, brow knitting. “Is he okay?”

“He’s fine,” Will answers, a touch too dismissively. *You’re too good for him, Melina*.

“That’s good,” she says, forcing a smile while nodding. She glances at the queue. “Are you buying him lunch?”

“Yes,” Will answers, turning his eyes on the couple ahead of him as they place their order.

“Everyone loves it here,” she says. “They do the best meat.”

“So I’ve read.”

“Anyway. Tell John I said hi.”

“I will.”

“Take care of each other,” she says with another uncomfortable smile before turning to go.

“Take care, Melina,” says Will as he watches her leave the restaurant. *Beware of those who prey on the good in this world. They have tears in their eyes, but their jaws are perpetually open.*

++++

Climbing the stairs, he reaches in his coat pocket for the key and pauses when he hears a sound on the other side of the door. He presses his ear to the painted surface. Makes out a quiet groan. No other voices. Unbeknownst to him, the door is unlocked, and when he leans in too much, it gives way under his weight, sending him half stumbling into the room with a rustling of the plastic bag.

Hannibal is lying on his front upon the bed. Masturbating. His face is turned to the side. Eyes closed. His lips parted to his shallow breaths. He would have heard Will coming in, but shows no intentions of delaying the task at hand. Will walks towards the desk and puts the bag down. He begins to remove its contents, ignoring the sudden gasp from the bed. Removing his coat and dropping it over the desk, he picks up a can of lemonade and tugs on the ring with some force before lifting the cold rim to his lips. As he gulps down the fizzy beverage, welcoming its harsh burn pouring down his throat, he can hear the other’s breaths beginning to steady behind him.

“That was quick,” says Hannibal a touch breathlessly. “Where did you go?”

Will lowers the lemonade, taking a deep breath. Swallowing, he puts the near empty can down and picks up the two large, circular aluminium containers, one stacked on top of the other.

“Somewhere that does meat,” he answers, turning around to find Hannibal reclining against the headboard, one hand dragging the cover over the lower half of his body. His lips fastening over a knuckle on the other as he sucks off a stray spattering of semen. Will looks up when Hannibal does, holding that dark gaze and hoping it doesn’t drop to the arousal tenting his own trousers.

“Sounds delightful,” says Hannibal with a smile, his eyes lowering to the containers as Will approaches the chair pulled up to the bedside. “What did you get?”

“Bistecca alla Fiorentinna,” Will answers, sitting down and holding out one of the containers. Taking it, Hannibal puts it on his lap.

“Good choice,” he says with approval. “Do we have eating utensils?”

“I forgot,” Will answers as he removes the lid. “I saw Melina.”

“Ah,” says Hannibal, also removing the lid and setting it down on the bedside table. Eyes perusing the contents of the container. “How is she?”

Will mutters a noncommittal noise in response, picking up a slice of beef. “She asked after you,” he says before lifting the meat to his lips. As he pops it into his mouth and begins to chew, he feels the other watching him, but doesn’t look up. “I told her she should forget about you,” he adds.

“Good advice.”

Will looks up to see Hannibal taking a particularly raw-looking morsel into his mouth before chewing with relish, his hooded eyes moving towards the balcony.

“Same advice you give yourself, no doubt,” he continues to say after swallowing, voice light. His fingers reach for another slice as he continues to gaze through the glass. “Every waking moment.”

“Never was very good at following advice,” Will utters, dropping his eyes to the contents of the container. “Unless it came from you.” Quietly bitter. Accusatory. Neither of which is acknowledged by the other.

They eat in silence. Hannibal consuming his meat at a steady pace in indication of his returning appetite after the worst of his fever. Will concentrating on chewing and swallowing. Anything but the erection still pressing uncomfortably against his trousers.

“I was thinking we could go for a walk after lunch,” says Hannibal eventually. Will continues to watch the dwindling contents of the container in his hand.

“No,” he answers, idly rearranging a slice of beef and feeling the other’s eyes on him. But Hannibal doesn’t retaliate, and they resume finishing their lunch in silence. After a while, Hannibal slides his bare legs over the edge of the bed. As he stands, Will sits up and leans back in his chair so the other can walk past. He tries not to look, but lifts his eyes to watch Hannibal pacing to the desk and putting down the empty container, his hand reaching for the remaining lemonade. Slipping the last piece of meat into his mouth, Will chews slowly as his eyes travel from heel to Verger brand. Listening to Hannibal opening the can and begin to down its contents. Observing the fluid shift of his shoulder blade as he lifts his arm to empty the can of its last drop. When he finishes, he deposits the rubbish in the bin and moves back to the wardrobe, stooping down on his way to pick up the towel and rub his hands clean in the wet terrycloth. Then, picking up the shirt from before, he slides off the hanger and begins to pull the crisp garment up his arms a second time. Will watches those dexterous fingers tripping through buttons in the mirror of the wardrobe door. Checking to see Hannibal is not looking, he glances lingeringly at the curves of his buttocks past the edge of his shirt before returning his eyes to empty aluminium.

“You’re staying here,” says Will, sucking the meat juice off his thumb.

“Is that an order?” Hannibal asks without turning around.

“Yes.”

“And if I don’t comply?”

An image flashes to the forefront of Will’s mind of pinging buttons and the same shirt trapping the other’s wrists behind his back. Breath misting the reflection of his parted lips in the mirror of the wardrobe door.

“I promise not to run,” says Hannibal, smiling at Will over his shoulder, and the abrupt thought of the other leaving him makes him sit very still in the chair. Those dark eyes look away again as Hannibal returns his attention to the contents of the wardrobe. *I see you, Will Graham. All your desire. All your fears*. “There are many monuments I would like to see in the city,” he continues to say. “Byzantine. Ottomon.”

The room is suddenly too small. Its air consumed by something that breathes rapid and open-mouthed. Will stares at the black stag pacing in angry circles the confinement of the room’s four walls, its great rack gouging devastating grooves into their surfaces on passing. Hannibal continues to list the historical locations of the waterfront city, but his voice travels to Will distorted and delayed. His eyes are fixed on the beast that draws near. Hooves stomping cracks into the white tiled floor.

“I’ll take that as a yes.”

At the clear sound of his voice, Will looks across the room. Hannibal finishes adjusting a cuff within the sleeve of his suit jacket and lowers his arms. Despite the facial evidence of his injuries made plain and visible by the afternoon light, his figure once more cuts a composed and dignified shape within the trappings of his immaculate attire. The pike having revealed itself by disturbing the surface of the water now swimming back down into its murky depths, taking the bait with it. *He pulls, but…*

Standing up from the chair, Will walks over to put the container in the bin. Then he paces to the desk and picks up his coat.

Like any fisherman

Meets Hannibal’s gaze as he puts it on.

“If you faint again,” he says, “I’m leaving you on the street.”

That smile again.

He is terrified of losing the catch.

“Deal.”

++++

Having spent at least four hours sightseeing, Will led the detour into a liquor store on the way back. They had barely stopped, except for a short meal at a restaurant, and even then they did not stay long. Not that they had anywhere else to rush off to, and could easily have sat back with a bottle of wine, watching people come and go. Rather, both had seemed ready to seek respite in the hushed space of Hannibal’s room. Somewhere to lie and potentially exchange words of conversation without the distraction of the city. For whilst he had followed Hannibal on their walk, there wasn’t a singular moment free from the question that has continued to weigh on Will’s mind since he saw that photo. He doesn’t know which to dread more, the asking of it, or the learning of the answer. Either way, he needed something strong.

Leaning against the headboard, Will takes another sip of his wine. Hannibal is sat at the desk, sketching. Initially, Will had been trying to research further into the murders on the tablet, but found he couldn’t concentrate and, as though he could sense his distraction, Hannibal had asked if he could use it to play some music. So instead, Will sat back and steadily worked his way through the drink. Worked his way up to asking as those classical notes weaved back and forth, up and down in the air between them. It feels strange, staring at the back of Hannibal’s head. He had always confronted him

face on in the past, be it in his real consulting room, or the one in his mind, and he doesn't like not being able to see his face, regardless of whether or not he would be able to read it. Tipping the last of the wine into his mouth, Will swallows and slowly climbs off the bed. Walking over, he perches on the end of the desk. Picks up the bottle while casting his eye over the page of his sketchbook.

"Nice," he comments idly as he refills his glass, watching the stroking tip of the pencil tracing the ample curves of a woman's breasts. *Another Bernini.*

"Even nicer if he had finished it," says Hannibal, and Will moves the mouth of the bottle to the near empty glass above the sketchbook.

"Truth Unveiled by Time," Will murmurs, filling the glass and putting down the bottle. Lifting his own to his lips, he watches that hand lay down the pencil and reach for the glass.

"How do you think he envisioned Time?" Hannibal asks, leaning back in the chair and taking a sip of his wine. Will tilts his head at the drawing. Imagines Hannibal stood where Time should be, holding up the cloth.

"As a perverted old man," he scoffs. Lifting the glass, Will glances at Hannibal as he slowly swallows. Those hooded eyes downcast as they muse over the sketch. A thoughtful smile on his lips.

"When it was purchased by the Italian government, they set the sculpture on a tilted plinth," murmurs Hannibal, pressing the rim to his mouth for a deep swallow. Will glimpses the undulation in his throat and the way he licks his lips afterwards. "Restoration put her back on a flat one," Hannibal continues to explain. "Thus, Truth is upright once more."

Looking at the sketch, Will feels Hannibal's eyes on his face and licks his lips unconsciously. They remain parted as he hesitates, waiting for the words to come.

"Are you going to finish it?" he asks eventually, voice quiet. Soft, even. His eyes slowly swivelling to meet black which have been waiting patiently. They study him for a heartbeat longer before thin lips part in careful consideration.

"Do you want to?" asks Hannibal, voice low and hushed. The faintest lowering of his lashes.

"I'm not very good at drawing," Will murmurs honestly, unable to look away but feeling a strange hammering beginning in his chest. He reaches distractedly for the bottle.

"Is that right?" says Hannibal, gazing into him. Will feels something touch his thigh and breaks eye contact to look down at the pencil. Taking it from the other's hand, he lifts his eyes to black once more. Before he can reply, Hannibal pushes back in the chair and stands. "You created something beautiful last time," he says, smiling as he wraps his hand around the neck of the bottle and gently pulls it from Will's grasp.

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Another bottle of wine later, Will is lying on the bed, fully clothed. Beside him, Hannibal is resting on his side, facing away. Staring through half closed eyes at the Verger brand on his back, Will recalls the other stood at the wardrobe earlier. The brief fantasy of asserting his dominance and forcing the arrogance from the infuriating man. Forcing, with his thick cock buried to the hilt in his arching body, Hannibal's submission as it stares back, open-mouthed and panting in the reflection of the wardrobe mirror. Panting like he did on the bluff. Willing, in that moment, to let Will do absolutely anything. The power throbs in his veins. In his hand where he clasps the bulge in his trousers, eyes shutting with

a lick of his lips as he gives himself a cruel squeeze. Behind his eyelids, he sees Hannibal masturbating on the bed. Sees himself climbing onto it behind him. Hears Mohamed's voice in his ear. *How did you manage it, exactly?* Sees those hooded eyes slipping open to look back at him over his shoulder. His hands digging into the cover. *Tell me the secret to forcing submission from a man who despises the idea of homosexual penetration*. He feels a hand grab his wrist and inhales sharply through the nose, eyes snapping open to see the Wendigo leaning over him.

Accentuated ribcage rising and falling as his long, claw-like hands fight him for purchase on his trousers. Long fingers grab his throat, cutting off the air. Will pries at the iron grip with his hands, his eyes falling to the cock protruding from the other's body as black as pitch and leaking clear fluid from its head. Chest heaving as he struggles to breathe, he feels the zip being tugged down on his trousers, and a warm hand snatch at his trapped arousal. Arching with a groan that mixes protest with pleading, Will squeezes shut his eyes as his hips begin to move on their own, pistoning frantically into that hand, then against stiff and throbbing flesh – the twin to his own erratic pulse. When he opens his eyes once more, it is to the sight of Hannibal in his lap, heavy lidded gaze downcast as he watches his own hand tugging furiously at their combined girths. His mouth agape to his shallow breaths which smell strongly of intoxication. His chest rising and falling in tandem with Will's. Jaw tensing, he grabs Hannibal's thighs with both hands and, with a loud grunt of effort, flips him onto his back. Sitting on Hannibal to pin him down, he knocks his hand away and seizes both their cocks. Grabs his throat with the other hand as he picks up the pace. He feels eyes burning into him, but refuses to look up. Keeps his focus on the swollen pink heads being choked by his fist and forced, with each vicious stroke, to ooze more precum. Hands move to grab his thighs, their palms burning into him through the material of his trousers. He's close. So is Will.

Then, he hears Hannibal utter a curse in Lithuanian and feels his body arching beneath him. Feels his cock pressing against his as it thickens spasmodically, and Will leans his face back instinctively, waiting for the angry spurts to land wetly over the other's heaving chest before taking himself in hand and inching up on his knees. Bringing himself closer to his teeth. Swallowing his heart and holding his breath, Will grabs his heavy prick by the base and smacks his shaft repeatedly against Hannibal's mouth, unable to suppress the low groan that escapes through the tight line of his lips when he sees it opening to receive him.

"*Fuck!*"

Moaning raggedly from the back of his throat, Will comes to a glimpse of ravenous teeth and tongue. Watches as those hooded eyes snap shut against the onslaught of his climax shooting thick and fast as his hand continues to pump, greedily milking every last drop from his swollen prick onto Hannibal's face and chest. "Fuck," he rasps again as he comes down from the high and clumsily climbs off the other. Standing up from the bed on unsteady legs, he runs a hand through his curls and starts wrestling himself back into his trousers. Lips still parted as he catches his breath.

He mumbles something sleepily, and Will glances over his shoulder to see Hannibal slowly wiping a cheek with the back of his hand before sucking on it languidly with lashes low. His barely open gaze already returning to the realm of repose. Swallowing at the strangely – impossibly - innocent sight, Will feels a pang, and is surprised to find he is still hard. But Hannibal has closed his eyes and gone back to sleep. Turning around, Will stares down at him. At his chest hair streaked with Will's glistening cum even whilst he lies there breathing quietly. The remnants of Will's mark across that cheekbone which he didn't quite manage to clean. *Panting like he did on the bluff. Willing, in that moment, to let Will do absolutely anything*. He stands there, chest gently heaving, eyes staring hard at that which cannot be separated from his own being, and knows, with heated turmoil, that it is not the lust for power alone that throbs in his veins.

Meteora

It is New Year's Eve. They begin the day at the highest point of Thessaloniki. Stood on the edge of the acropolis, with the Triangle Tower behind them, and the city unravelling towards the sea below, Will and Hannibal observe the encroachment of dawn. Beneath the endless stretch of fading navy, purpling clouds smother the city, and through this barrier, a burst of yellow and orange begins to bleed into the sky. Gradually seeping across the tops of white high-rise rooftops and invading every space it finds. Between the city and the limitless, stretches the sea. A vast, deceptively calm and still mirror to the actions of the sun.

"What a terrible tease it must have been," says Hannibal from beside him, "having the best vantage point, yet not being able to access it."

"I suppose they would have had their memories," Will murmurs. Hannibal makes a thoughtful sound.

"A mind palace within the confines of a real castle."

Will considers how this view of Thermaikos Bay contrasts with the history of the imposing stone structure behind them. It was used as a prison from the end of the eighteenth century, and even with the flawless line of the sea in the horizon before him, Will is thinking about those dim corridors and paint peeling off aged yellow walls and cold blue metal bars guarding doorways. Recalls making his way down a dim passage, following the echoing steps of the great black stag. His eyes had been wandering into the cells on passing, and each one had revealed yet another ghost from his mind prison to spur him with quickening steps towards the light at the end of the corridor. When he found Hannibal later on, he had wanted to ask what he saw in the cells, but knew the other would only enquire of his visions in return, and did not relish the thought of analysing too deeply what he saw. Toying, despite having already learnt the answer, with the remains of a dissected rat whose body had long begun the process of putrification.

"Do you still want to go?" Hannibal asks, and Will senses Abigail smiling from where she stands on the wall between them.

"Aren't you afraid I will throw us off the rock," he utters.

"It would be a quick death with no sea to catch us."

Glancing askance at the thoughtful tone of his voice, Will sees Hannibal give the city one last look before turning to face the ex-prison, his hooded eyes scaling the ancient brick wall.

"You would have to be sure," he adds drily, lofting his invisible eyebrows at Will as he strolls away.

++++

Two hours have flown by since they set off from Thessaloniki. Will stares out the window of the passenger side at the rolling brown hills covered in green shrubbery and melting snow. Piles of it line either side of the road which has mostly been cleared of the worst of the snow storm to hit the region a couple of days ago. Drivers are cautioned to be careful, but, as Will has always felt since understanding the true nature of his companion, with a man like Hannibal Lecter behind the wheel, any further risk is just salt added to the wound. The memory of Hannibal pulling up alongside him in the police car resurfaces, as does the urge to smile when he'd asked whether Will was going his way. It had been a difficult moment, with all the mixed emotions reaching boiling point behind his steady

blue stare. And perhaps it had been an unconscious effort to find release in some way, to breathe, even, which had led to the dangerous bubble of laughter that threatened to travel its way up his throat and would have escaped had he not swallowed it down at the time with resolve. He has since been in the car with Hannibal, and each time he has looked back at that moment, wondering at that resolve.

“This is the second time you drive us to the edge,” he says, voice quiet but loud within the hushed space of the car. “Literally speaking.”

“I was going to say,” comments Hannibal, “did we ever leave. Metaphorically speaking.”

“You’re not exactly one for the quiet life,” Will utters, leaning back in the seat to watch the road ahead.

“You consider yourself to be?” asks Hannibal, eyes also on the road.

“You know I can be.”

Hannibal hums in neither agreement nor disagreement.

“How tired are you?” he asks, and Will remembers opening his eyes to see Hannibal lying asleep on his side at the edge of the bed. Uncomfortable with sleeping in the same bed, lest he had further visions in the middle of the night of the Wendigo attacking him, only to reveal itself as Hannibal, Will had fallen asleep in the chair pulled up by the bedside. His limbs were stiff and aching to be stretched, but he hadn’t moved as Hannibal continued to sleep with his lips slightly parted, lashes still. His expression harmless and unsuspecting. A predator turned prey. *Your lamb turns wolf. Let me deliver you, my great stag, from your misery*. He had stared at that face without stirring, as though afraid of alerting the other to his presence. Found he enjoyed the act of watching as Hannibal continued to lie there, oblivious. The morning light painting a gentle warmth across those sharp cheekbones. The cuts and bruises fading fast, which in turn stoked a desire to assert himself. To mark the other man and claim the demon as his own. He would do it with his hands, of course. And with his teeth. Sinking into the skin of his-

“Will.”

“I’m fine,” he says suddenly, jerking from the quickly derailing train of thought and turning his face to frown fixedly at the landscape.

“I was going to ask if you wanted to drive for the remainder of the journey.”

“Sure.”

“But if you would rather rest-”

“I’m fine.”

“Very well.”

++++

They reach the next rest stop and park outside a low stone building with a terracotta roof. As Hannibal heads indoors to use their restroom, Will stands by the car, idly looking over the large garish boards attached to the walls of a stone archway advertising kebabs for six euros. Beyond the archway, the outdoor seating stands empty and unused with snow still covering their surfaces. Turning around, he watches instead the fields of dormant olive trees and the huge, sloping mountains behind them. For a

moment, he considers getting behind the wheel, slamming the door shut and driving off. He wouldn't go far, and would likely have to make a U-turn somewhere down the line, but he'd do it just to see Hannibal's face. Pulling up alongside the other with his window wound down and his arm resting casually on the edge. *Going my way?*

When Hannibal returns, Will is already sat behind the wheel. Opening the door, he climbs in the passenger side and offers Will a bottle of water which he takes with a mutter of thanks. Closing the door, Hannibal breaks the lid of his own bottle and begins to take a sip.

"How much longer?" Will asks. Swallowing, Hannibal lowers the bottle to speak.

"Just under an hour," he answers before taking another gulp.

Setting off again, Will welcomes the distraction of the road and does not speak as he drives. Seemingly content with the silence, neither does Hannibal. Soon, as the car climbs an increasingly steep hill, the towering columns of the Meteora begin to loom into sight, so stark in appearance, as though a colossal blade had severed these rock formations from the rest of the land with its mighty blows. Crowning the first of these giants to present itself, is another structure of white walls and terracotta tile. Snow crusting every crag and crevice of both rock and manmade presence. *Meteora. Suspended in air*.

"You will not find these magnificent formations in Greek literature," explains Hannibal. "Not even in their myths."

Will watches the monastery as he drives.

"The first to inhabit the Meteora were a group of ascetic hermit monks," Hannibal continues to say, the hint of disdain in his syllables not going unnoticed.

"Does the life of abstinence and living away from society not do it for you," Will scoffs.

"I would rather eat myself."

"Which part."

"The worst tasting part."

A pause.

"Allow me to retract my earlier statement," muses Hannibal aloud, and in his peripheral vision, Will sees him tilting his head in reconsideration. "It would imply a lack of pleasure in the act of consuming my own flesh."

"The travesty."

"Don't be a doubting Thomas, Will," says Hannibal lightly, but Will is prepared for the true weight of his stones, or shards of broken teacup, being catapulted his way. "Although I know how keen you are to push your finger into my gaping wound."

Sass is not normally a word he would associate the other with, especially with the man's pedantic distaste for rudeness. The only exception to the rule being impudence aimed directly at Will.

"Perhaps you have forgotten the last time a comparison was made between yourself and the saviour," he retorts.

He had meant it in jest, but regrets saying it when Hannibal does not immediately respond. Will glances over from the corners of his eyes to see the other closing his left hand over his right. Thumb stroking his wrist absently through the coat sleeve. Looking up, he finds those dark eyes half drawn and staring ahead through the windscreen. An uncomfortable sensation begins to spread from within his chest, and he turns his eyes back on the road. He licks his lips before parting them, ready to apologise.

“I admit that was the closest I had got to being in trouble then,” says Hannibal mildly, voice quiet and faintly fond as he turns his face to the approaching column. “The closest I had felt to discovering the true taste of affinity.”

Will frowns silently at the narrowing road ahead. A weight in his chest growing more prominent the more the other continues to speak.

“I strove to live, of course. To consider my next move. But…”

He wants to open the window. Let the cold draught steal away the remaining words and command their attention with its razor chill.

“I suppose I would be lying if I said I wasn’t just a little intoxicated by your response,” the voice beside him continues to murmur monotonously its analysis. The shield permitted when one speaks objectively of the past. “Rather, a response in your absence. Perhaps you regret not having opened my wrists yourself.”

Will feels his jaw clenching.

“But no,” says Hannibal, voice light again. Unarmed. “There isn’t a part of me which I wouldn’t consider worthy of consumption.”

For a moment, Will doesn’t say anything. But the further he drives down the winding road towards their destination, the more he can relate to the thawing piles of snow scattered across the land until, inhaling inwardly, he slowly releases a sigh.

“They might choke on your heart, it’s so hard,” he finally utters, voice quiet and low. Trying to steer them as far away as possible from the path of uncomfortable and unwanted confession.

“Not before they choke on my penis.”

Will suddenly scoffs despite himself, an eyebrow arching as Hannibal continues to talk.

“The penis is notoriously tough with a structure composed mainly of blood vessels and trabeculae of smooth muscle and connective tissue. Even in its flaccid state, it would take quite a culinary genius to turn it into a gastronomical delight.”

“But…you’ve done it.”

He looks at Hannibal, eyebrow raised, still. Hannibal looks back, and smiles like the cat who got the cream. Unable to help himself, Will feels his face breaking into an awkward amalgamation of a frown and a smile, his eyes staying on that infuriating, albeit familiarly so, expression just a touch longer than he can usually bear before he returns his attention to the road. Sees, for the briefest of moments, the figures of Primavera superimposed across the winter landscape, and does not expect a confession of his own surfacing without warning to the forefront of his mind. The words he had never allowed himself to utter at the time within the space of the silent gallery. Not with those eyes watching him.

Not now, whilst that face has turned back to the window to gaze in quiet awe at these secluded monasteries hanging in the air. Perhaps he had already known, all along. Perhaps that's why it would have hurt the more when Will had drawn his blade on him upon the streets of Florence. Perhaps all this time, he is simply waiting. Will would not even be surprised to see Chiyoh pacing the grounds of the monastery if he looked carefully. And that moment which had passed for him to have said it, continued to weigh on him every waking day, even after the fall, like the ache of an old wound, or a pair of stubborn lips, waiting to be teased open.

I've missed you.

Mani

The Holy Trinity monastery sits on the top of a pillar made of sandstone and conglomerate, and stretches four hundred metres up into the sky. Nobody can explain exactly how these rock columns came into existence, only that a process involving the ravages of earthquakes, wind and water had played a shaping hand in their creation. Anybody who has stepped foot in the monastery, however, can vouch for the effort required to reach it. There are a hundred and forty steps carved into the rock, and the further they travel up the stairway as it wraps around the column, the stronger and louder the wind blows. At times, it drowns out the early chirping of birds and the scraping of their walking shoes upon chiselled stone. Glancing up from the worn edges of the steps, Will pauses when he sees Hannibal is not in front of him. Looking back over his shoulder, he finds him a few steps down, stood beneath a section of overhanging rock with his arms folded upon the outer wall. The wind whipping the longer strands of his hair across his brow and sending his lashes a flutter. Stroking between the surfaces of his parted lips.

“Before they built this stairway, the only access to the monastery was by ladder or net,” he explains, voice loud and a little breathless still from the climb. Following the other’s gaze, Will casts his eye over the hilly terrain below as he climbs down towards him. Taking in the vast network of frozen treetops stretching out into the distance, and the pale body of the path they had followed as it snakes its way to the foot of the cliff – the latter made particularly hazardous by undisturbed ice. Stopping to stand beside Hannibal, he folds his arms upon the wall.

“Only when the Lord willed the rope to break did they replace it,” Hannibal continues to say, his eyes dropping to the valley floor. Will also looks down, considering the prospect of being pulled up on a leap of faith.

“Must have been exciting for them,” he says.

“It is better to accept the reality of the fall than to place your hopes on a reticent creator.”

“You need a degree of hope to take a risk,” Will utters, immediately regretting the weight of the words and their potential to fuel any further reflections on the past. There is too much scope for thinking out here, he decides, with nothing but the stillness of nature surrounding them. “You’d better not pass out before we reach the top,” he swiftly adds without looking over, turning from the wall to resume climbing. “I’m not carrying you.”

“For the record,” says Hannibal from behind as he begins to climb up after him, “I have lost count of the times I’ve carried your hefty hindquarters.”

Will stops and turns his face to the side.

“Hefty hindquarters,” he repeats flatly, watching the other approach his step and pause to regard him with a lofting of his invisible eyebrows.

“Hefty hindquarters,” Hannibal echoes simply and Will parts his lips, ready with a comeback when a hard and unexpected blow to his buttocks makes him stumble and reach out to brace his hand against the rugged wall beside him. Stunned, he stares at that cool and smiling countenance as it passes him by.

“See? You barely moved,” he hears the other say amusedly.

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It is a mixture of the early hour, the time of the year, and its reputation for being the least accessible of the six monasteries which gives the Holy Trinity its air of desertion. Stood in the nave of the main church, Will stares up at the dizzying fresco of saints congregating in the vaulted space of the dome. With a shifting of clouds, the morning is obscured, limiting the amount of light entering through the singular window on either side, and making the sea of halos glow a dim gold. Hannibal is stood beside him, head tilted back as he watches up at the depiction of Christ.

“The word Pantokrator is a compound of the Greek words pantos, meaning all, and kratos, which refers to might,” he explains, hooded eyes fixed on those of the painted figure. “Its verb meaning can be translated as the ability to accomplish or to sustain. The power to do absolutely anything.”

His voice is thoughtful, and Will can tell by the expression on his face that Hannibal is enjoying his own manipulation of the meanings associated with the religious symbol. Unable to help himself, he folds his arms and tilts his head as he turns his eyes from the other to the ceiling of the dome.

“It was a portrayal of Christ used by rulers to vindicate the right of kings,” he states. “Made them appear special whilst giving them the excuse to control the people.”

“Perhaps,” parries Hannibal nonchalantly, “but it is the awe inspired by our earthly superiors that keeps the masses spellbound.”

Will lowers his gaze to catch the self-satisfied smile lifting the other’s lips.

“Peasants might smell, but they can also smell bullshit from a mile off,” he says flatly.

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Having had the climb and the monastery to themselves, the unexpected sight of company comes as somewhat of an affront, but also as a welcome distraction. He had spotted the two figures as soon as he’d stepped out the back of the building – a couple stood beside the giant white cross of the viewing platform at the top of the hill. Dressed for hiking with the hoods of their coats up, the fur trim billowing in the wind. As Hannibal makes his way up the hill, no doubt led by his insatiable curiosity, Will follows him until they are invading the platform and alerting the people to their presence. One of them curses when they realise they are no longer alone, a gloved hand moving to clasp over the heart. The face being shielded by the hood is crowded by a heavy black beard that is long enough to hide the length of the neck. His response makes his partner spin around on the spot, revealing matching facial hair, but reddish in colour. Both men have brown eyes which blink in surprise at Will and Hannibal. Both are also wearing beanies beneath their hoods, and check shirts of the same pattern but different in colour, the fabric of which peeps out from between the zipped edges of their heavy coats. Despite not wielding an axe or chainsaw, they look, to Will, like a couple of lost lumberjacks.

“Sorry to scare you,” says Hannibal with a smile, hands in the pockets of his coat.

“You made him jump like a little girl,” chortles the one with the auburn facial hair as he clutches a cell phone in his right hand, the camera function on its screen. His accent sounds eastern European. Russian, perhaps. The other grunts and punches him in the arm.

“Did you hear them coming?”

“No, but I didn’t jump like a little girl.”

Dark beard laughs sarcastically before sticking his hand out to Hannibal who takes it amiably.

“Antonios. And this is my idiot brother, Nicholaos.”

“Nice to meet the both of you,” says Hannibal, and Antonios releases his hand to offer it to Will, who also takes it.

“We thought we were the only ones here,” says Nicholaos as he holds his camera just so to take another photo of the view.

“So did we,” says Will, sticking his hands back into his coat pockets.

There is a pause as the four of them take in the sight of the snow-covered village below and the gargantuan slopes of the white mountains beyond.

“What a view,” one of the brothers eventually mutters, and Will glances askance at Hannibal. Thinks he sees in that lidded gaze the same thought running through his mind, the words too impolite to be uttered, and thus remaining an unspoken feeling between them. *Shame we have to share it*.

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Nearing the end of the path, Will looks towards their car and sees someone waiting for them. A woman in hiking boots, winter coat and hat, holding a lead. At the end of which sits a chocolate teddy bear.

“Is that...”

“A lagotto romagnolo.”

The dog clocks Will and opens its mouth to stick out a pink tongue in greeting.

“Fungi is a culinary speciality of Meteora,” explains Hannibal. “I found us a local who can show us where to find the best specimens. She also happens to be a truffle hunter.”

As they near, the woman holds up a hand and shouts a jovial greeting in Greek. Hannibal does the same back.

“If you like the dog, just say,” he utters quietly.

“I think the idea is to excavate, not bury helpful locals in the ground.”

Soon they are standing there shaking hands with the woman and sharing their verdicts on the Holy Trinity. As he listens to Hannibal rattle off some eloquent nonsense, Will crouches down to fuss over Mani – short for the Greek word for mushroom – and can’t help feeling himself thaw a little further as the dog gives him its curly paw as though offering his services to him. *Don’t worry, Mr Graham*, he imagines it saying with a Greek accent. *I may look like a wolf’s breakfast and have the most unoriginal name for a dog of my occupation, but trust me when I say we will find your buried humanity*.

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At first, they were following Agata and Mani, but she soon handed the lead to Will as she hung back to chat with Hannibal about their travels. Letting Mani show them the way, Will feels every small fissure of conflicting emotion slowly bleed away into the surroundings, until he is left with a sense of

tranquillity as calm and clean as the frozen forest air. When Mani suddenly throws himself into a fit of digging, Will can't help but chuckle at the sight. And whilst other things happen on their trek that unleashes the rare and musical sound of his mirth on this foreign land so far away from home – things like Hannibal slipping on ice and falling onto his own hindquarters, or the dog kicking an unexpected shower of icy dirt into Hannibal's face as he leans closer to observe - none makes Will laugh more freely than when, stood before a tree, about to relieve himself, he suddenly hears Mani sprinting up all rustling paws and excited panting, and looks over his shoulder to watch the hunter leaping at the backs of Hannibal's legs with enough force to make him stumble and curse in Lithuanian as he abandons urinating mid-flow to fend off the dog.

"What did Agata say was the taverna favourite around here?" Will snickers lowly as he faces the tree again with a mischievous smile. "Leek sausage?"

"If you're not careful," Hannibal begins to grunt, and Will listens to his continued struggle to free himself of Mani's fascination, "there will be a new delicacy on the menu."

"You'd have to catch me first," says Will. "If you can spare a moment from falling on your arse."

"All this talk of leeky sausages and arses, Will. Anyone would think you're trying to tell me something."

"I am," answers Will, zipping up and looking back at Hannibal over his shoulder. The other has resorted to picking up the dog and stands there like he's about to hand Will a hard-won plushie prize. Smiling with a lofting of his brows, he lowers his eyes to Hannibal's feet.

"You've pissed on your shoes."

Truffles

Will would have happily sat under the frozen trees for the rest of god knows how long. At ease in the camper chair, nursing a tin mug of something that steams, or sipping from a flask that promises the sort of heat that burns on the way down only to leave your entire body or mind aglow. A dog in his proximity, entertaining itself. Nose following excitedly the abundance of forest smells. Lifting the mug to his lips, he glances up past the rim at Hannibal, sat opposite conversing with Agata. His hooded eyes half-drawn as they watch their guide's face amusedly, an easy smile on his lips. He doesn't have a dog of his own to enjoy this with. But he has Hannibal. With that nose of his. *Maybe it's not so bad*.

At some point, he nods off to the quiet murmur of their voices and the intermittent trill of a bird, and dreams he is walking through the forest alone. The sun is setting behind him, and he follows the distant sound of a crackling fire hidden in the labyrinth of tree trunks. As he weaves his way through them, stepping deeper into the heart of darkness, he glimpses a glowing light and stalks towards it. Upon his approach of the small clearing, surrounded by a wall of trees whose thawed barks reflect the lapping yellow flames, he sees Hannibal. Sat in a camp chair with his back to Will as he busies with something over the fire, the nature of which is obscured by his figure. Mani is lying beside him on the floor. Despite the innocent sight of the dog, a sudden trepidation sinks like a rock into his stomach, rooting him to the ground. Sensing his presence, Hannibal looks back over his shoulder.
"Just in time," he announces before turning away. "Dinner is almost ready." Feet moving on their own, Will makes his way over to them. Sees, as he nears, Agata propped in a camp chair to the side of the fire. Her teeth exposed through the gaping map of missing cheek muscle, and glinting a dull ivory in the approaching dim. Her eyes are glassy and staring unblinkingly ahead at nothing. Suddenly, the pupils move – fixing on Will, and with a sharp gasp, he stumbles back into a camp chair. As he falls into it, a tin canteen is held out to him. "Braised cheek with black truffle," he says with flourish. Despite himself, Will stares down at the contents of the canteen. At the pale whorl of flesh crowning the glistening tumour of truffles. Their knobbly surfaces running with a dark red jus in the firelight.
"Will?"
The trembling quality of her voice triggers the same palpitations from that night, and his breaths leave him shallow and afraid. Beside him, Hannibal eats with a metallic clunk of cutlery against tin. Slowly, against his wishes, Will lifts his eyes and sees a black mass forcing its way through the gaping wound of Abigail's throat. She stares at him with her mouth hanging open in shock, unable to comprehend, lashes a flutter as she chokes in silence. The first truffle pushes itself free, releasing, like a crack in a dam, the furious arcs of the red deluge amassing behind the queue of truffles fighting to make their way out of her throat.

Hannibal is interrupted mid-sentence by Will's sudden shout as he wakes so violently, he almost topples himself out of his camp chair. Eyes darting around erratically as though to check he has definitely returned to this realm. His chest heaving as though he has had to swim all the way back.
"Are you alright?" Agata asks, drawing blue eyes towards her, their depths having shed the heat of sexual frustration that Hannibal has started to grow accustomed to recognising upon the other's waking moments, leaving behind a tormented stare of unbridled fear. It warms that part of his heart to see it.
"Welcome back," he adds with a smile, enjoying the way Will avoids his gaze as he leans forward in the chair, hands clasping his knees.
"Did you have a bad dream?" Agata continues to ask, and Hannibal continues to sip his coffee as Will shuts his eyes and swallows hard.
"I'm f-" he manages to utter before, hand flying over his mouth, he stands from the chair and staggers hurriedly away into the trees. The dog immediately gets up to follow, ignoring its owner's instructions

to stay. He and Agata watch the two of them disappear from sight until the sound of Will vomiting travels echoingly back to them.
“I hope it’s not my cooking,” he says, lofting his invisible eyebrows at his company who only scrunches up her nose in protest.
“No,” she chuckles lowly, drawing out the single accented syllable as she lifts her tin mug. “It was delicious! Even if it makes me throw up, I would eat it again, it was so nice.”
He smiles charmingly at her, also lifting his mug.
“Thank you, Agata. If I had more ingredients, it would have been even better.”
“People never ask to cook, and my truffle pasta is only so-so. Maybe we should be business partners,” says Agata amusedly. Somewhere in the forest, Will can be heard retching again. The smile on Hannibal’s lips broaden as he tilts his head at the prospect.
“I must admit, cooking is one of my greatest passions in life,” he muses aloud. *The other is busy insulting it behind a tree*.

“No, Mani,” Will utters as, bent over with a hand against the tree, he uses his other one to wave the dog away as it tries to come closer to the emptied contents of his stomach. A mess of pasta and black truffle shavings. Nothing else, thankfully. “You’re supposed to find it, not eat it,” he says, wiping his mouth again with the back of his hand as Mani stands there watching him with pink tongue lolling. Taking a breath, he leans back against the tree, eyes lifting to the midday sky, the changing colours a reminder that time continues to run, as fast as it likes, but memories always catch up, and regardless of which corner of the world he flees to, she will always be with him.

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He gives the lagotto romagnolo one last fond pet of its curly head before it follows after its owner who bids them farewell one more time.
“Don’t forget my business proposal,” she cries, and Hannibal says something back in Greek. They stand there by the car, watching dog and owner travelling in the opposite direction until they’re just two specks of blue and brown against the white landscape. The trill of birds return with sudden clarity, and Will boxes the desire inspired by the presence of the brothers to be left alone with Hannibal on this foreign terrain, as well as the simultaneous urge to hurry after the truffle hunter and her trusty companion, shut them all up in her car, and drive off without looking back. He needs something to distract him from these conflicted emotions, and does not relish the prospect of spending the three hour drive back to Thessaloniki sat in the passenger seat, waiting to be preyed on by sleep. After climbing up and down all those stone steps and trekking the surrounding forest immediately after, he is physically worn, and hopes Hannibal has nothing else strenuous planned.
“I’ll drive,” he says, fishing the car keys from his coat pocket.
“Are you sure?” Hannibal asks. “You could lie down in the back if you wanted. Get some rest.” Will stares woodenly at the other across the roof of the car.
“I could lie down with you,” he adds brightly, like a father trying to pacify his discontented child.
“Get in the car,” Will utters, breaking eye contact to pull on the handle of the driver’s door.

They haven’t been on the road for long when, rounding the edge of a hill, two familiar looking coats with fur-trim hoods appear on the roadside. As they get closer to them, Will sees one with his arm dragged over the shoulders of the other, the latter supporting his steps which appear to be hindered by a bad limp. With nobody following, Will slows down upon approach, and watches the hoods swivel in their direction, the faces within them lighting up in recognition, and one of them – the one with the auburn facial hair playing the supporting role – raises his free arm in greeting. Lowering the window as he pulls them to a gradual stop beside the two men, Will is about to ask if they need some assistance when Hannibal leans across him to smile amiably at the brothers. Even after the climb and trek, his aftershave cuts through the air with ruthless sandalwood and patchouli.
“Going our way?” he asks, and Will resists the urge to clasp the other’s face with his hand and push

him back into his seat.
“Just trying to get back to Kalambaka,” explains the brother with the dark beard. Will looks in the direction of his gesturing glove to the snow-covered village in the distance behind them. The one they had gazed upon from the heights of the Holy Trinity earlier.
“Idiot here fell over,” the other pipes up, shifting his brother’s weight against himself as he protests at being called an idiot.
“Mine fell on his arse,” states Will flatly, glancing down towards their boots and ignoring Hannibal’s delicate clearing of his throat as he maintains his invasion of Will’s personal space and sense of smell.
“It is winter,” comments Hannibal casually as he looks the brothers over. “A lot of ice.”
“What have you done?” asks Will.
“What have we not?” chuckles one, which sets the other off. Will catches sight of the shrewd smile teasing the corner of Hannibal’s mouth, and returns his attention to the brothers’ faces as they shake their heads at one another.
“We think it’s a sprained ankle.”
“We hope.”
“Get in the back,” says Hannibal. “We’ll give you a lift.”
“Thank God. This bastard’s heavy.”
“Not as heavy as you.”
“Shut up and get in the car, you idiot.”
“Why you always calling me idiot.”
“Because you complain when I call you princess.”
Will listens to the brothers carry on as they open the door and start climbing in. Hannibal leans back in his seat.
“I don’t recall the last time someone referred to me as belonging to them,” he says idly.
“It was a figure of speech,” Will utters, waiting for the door to be pulled shut before putting the car back into drive. Behind them, the brothers buckle up and sit back with contented sighs.
“So!” one of them begins to say emphatically, commanding their attention. Will looks in the rear view mirror to meet two pairs of curious brown. “You are married?”
Will answers no at the same time as Hannibal answers yes. After a micropause, Will answers again with yes at the same time as Hannibal answers with no.
“Uh oh,” chuckles one of the brothers amusedly.
“It’s okay my friends,” pipes up the other. “We understand,” he adds amiably, as though to nip it in the bud. *Say no more*.
“Are either of you?” asks Hannibal, and glancing askance, Will sees hooded eyes watching the road ahead. His lips a relaxed line of mild amusement.
“If marriage is being stuck with someone for the rest of your life, then yes, we are married,” complains red beard. “Most definitely.”
“Most unfortunately,” says the other, joining in and receiving an elbow in the side.
“Hey, what you mean unfortunate?”
“I mean you are like bad luck.”
“I am not the one who fall over like an idiot.”
“Again, with the idiot.”
There is the sound of a hand making contact with the back of a head, followed by more squabbling. Neither Will nor Hannibal say anything as he continues to drive.

Then, without warning, one of them cries out in surprise.
“Look!”
All four of them look to their left.
“Did you see that? It was a-” the brother continues to say when something else catches his attention. Grabbing Will’s shoulder, he gasps, “Watch o-”
His eyes snap back to the windscreen, foot slamming on the break instinctively, but it’s not soon enough, and Will feels – they all feel - the impact of the collision before he can register what it is

they've just hit. When the car lurched from the contact, he knew that whatever it was had carried enough mass to be a person. All four of them hurry to get out of the vehicle with a click of seatbelts and car doors being swung open. Will steps forward and sees the victim collapsed in a snow pile on the side of the road. He hears Hannibal coming to his side, followed by the brothers. They stand there in a line, watching down at the wolf lying on its front. After a moment, Hannibal moves closer, squatting down to examine the animal. Its yellow eyes turn on him as he reaches out with a gloved hand. They fixate on Will as Hannibal touches it.
"Wow, is a big wolf," utters a brother from beside him, "is good job we were in the car."
"Is very strange to see wolf here by the road," says the other. "Most times they stay in the trees."
Will continues to stare into those unblinking eyes as Hannibal exhales through the nose and slowly straightens up. He steps back to Will's side, hands in his coat pockets.
"It's bad," he says.
"How bad," Will asks.
"He's in pain," Hannibal answers. "There's no way to know how long it will be before he dies." Will breaks eye contact with the wolf to look at Hannibal with a frown, but not knowing what to say. The brothers are quiet, seemingly not knowing what to say, neither.
"Come," says Hannibal eventually with a hand on his shoulder. "Let's get our friends to the village."
Will listens to the sound of Hannibal and the brothers stepping back to the car, but his ears have filled with the sound of breathing, laborious and loud, and he doesn't know whether it is his or the wolf's as he turns from the animal and steps back to the car.

St Sisoës

Having dropped the brothers off in the old town quarters of Kalambaka, Hannibal instructs Will to move over. Stepping out of the parked car, Will looks down the street at the towering wall of sandstone in the distance. Above it, grey clouds are gathering.
“Where are we going?” he asks, arms folded as Hannibal comes towards him.
“Kastoria,” he answers, reaching past Will to grab the handle on the driver’s door.
“What’s in Kastoria?” he asks without moving.
“Something I wish to see.”

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Hannibal has been standing in front of the fresco for a long time. Will has been standing behind him, observing in silence. His legs are aching from the day’s events, but it’s still a long drive back to Thessaloniki. Tired of standing and sitting, he is struck with an impulsive desire to swim. Or rather, to lie on his back like he had done that night, staring up at the stars. The waves lapping at his bleeding scalp. His head in the crook of Hannibal’s arm. Exhaling quietly, he walks towards the other, stopping to stand beside him.
“Didn’t we see this at the Holy Trinity?” he asks, eyes on the saint bent over an open tomb.
“Yes,” answers Hannibal, and when he doesn’t elaborate, Will glances askance to find concentration pinching that sharp countenance. A contemplative frown that draws together those invisible eyebrows. Will watches it for a moment longer before turning his eyes back on the wall.
“Another memento mori,” he utters, recalling the skeleton with its hands held up in prayer on the floor of the Norman Chapel. Brow knitting, he tilts his head in memory of the translation in the chapel of the monastery. “The pitiful sight of you makes me cry.”
“I prefer dismaying sight,” corrects Hannibal. “Causing the heart to shed tears as one contemplates the debt all men owe.” Hooded eyes fixate on the remains depicted in the fresco. “A tomb now suffices him for whom the whole world was not sufficient.”
“Alexander the Great,” states Will, studying the faded image of the skeletons. At the chapel of the Holy Trinity, there had only been one depicted in the fresco. Here, there are three lying together, side by side. “Who are the other two?” he utters.
“It’s most likely metaphorical,” Hannibal answers thoughtfully. “All men are equal in death.”
Will hums half-heartedly, remembering the ache in his legs.
“Well,” he begins to say, turning to face the other. “Now that we have thoroughly depressed ourselves, can we be on our way, please?”

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It’s a two hour journey back to Thessaloniki. Will had told Hannibal he was going to drive, and the other had not protested. He assumed Hannibal had exhausted his list of chapels for the day, much to his relief; he will be happy if they don’t see another fresco for the remainder of their time in Greece.
“Did you opt to drive in fear of falling asleep?” asks Hannibal from beside him.
“I prefer to stay awake,” answers Will after a moment, eyes on the road.
“You woke reeking of fear in the forest.”
Will doesn’t comment.
“What did you dream of?” asks Hannibal curiously, and he stares with added conviction at the road ahead, tight lipped. Sensing his reluctance, Hannibal adds lightly, “must have been traumatising.”
Ignoring him, Will focuses on the monotony of driving. Eventually, however, he senses her sat in the back, watching them, and glances in the rear view mirror to find the backseat empty. Returning his eyes to the road, he inhales and exhales inwardly, head tilting back against the headrest.

“I was in the forest,” he begins to say as his eyes fall to a close halfway. “It was getting dark.” Beside him, Hannibal is quiet as he listens. Licking his lips, Will lets his mouth hang agape in thought for a moment, not enjoying recalling what he saw. “You were there,” he finally adds. “Cooking. Over a fire.”
“What was I cooking?”
Will swallows before answering.
“Braised cheek with truffles.”
Hannibal makes a soft, pleasurable noise.
“Have you missed my culinary skills, Will,” he asks amusedly, “even whilst you left my most recent dish semi digested on the forest floor.”
“Are you expecting an apology?” Will snorts quietly.
“Please continue.”
Not wanting to, Will knits his brow.
“I saw Agata,” he says hesitantly. “Sat in a camp chair. With half her face missing.”
“Mn.”
Will glances across at Hannibal. Those hooded eyes have slipped to a close. Dropping his gaze, he sees the hand clasped over the front of the other’s trousers.
“Don’t make me stop the car,” he utters, eyes averting.
“There is no need to.”
At the words, Will thinks suddenly of Hannibal’s head in his lap. His hand pressing down on his hair. He hears the metallic click of buckle and rasp of leather followed by the subtle but unmistakable sound of the zipper releasing twin rows of teeth.
“Can you not.”
“No.”
Stealing a glance from the corners of his eyes, he briefly catches the stark entirety of Hannibal before a hand closes around its girth.
“It is far better to coax the coney out of its hole than to bash it over the head,” Hannibal murmurs, and Will ignores the heat beginning to build in his loins.
“Spoils the meat,” Will scoffs, keeping his eyes on the road as he hears Hannibal spitting, then the slick sound of skin gliding on skin.
“To quote the author of an article on Spanish Ibérico pigs,” says Hannibal a touch breathlessly, “when it comes to making a high-quality, rarefied product like jamon Ibérico-” He interrupts himself with a hushed sound of pleasure. “-a little tenderness goes a long way.”
“We don’t have anything to clean up with,” Will mutters.
“On the contrary,” breathes Hannibal, “there is always something to clean up with.”
Jaw flexing, Will debates pulling over. Then, Hannibal suddenly stops. Glancing down, he sees the other putting himself away. The hard bulge of his arousal tenting the fabric of his trousers. Dragging his eyes away, Will is aware of how uncomfortable his own have grown. After a while listening to the returning silence, he leans his head back against the headrest, feigning nonchalance at the crackling charge of thwarted release still lingering in the air.
“Rediscovered your modesty?” he scoffs quietly.
“Never.”
He hears Hannibal shifting to get comfortable in his seat and continues to drive the rest of the way back to Thessaloniki. Continues to pretend he is not thinking about sinking his fingers into the other’s hair and dragging his head over.

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By the time they make it back to the port city, it is late afternoon, and their room is aglow with the red-orange sunset. Exhausted, Will lies on his back on the bed. Hands clasped over his stomach. Eyes closed. The muffled roar of the shower filters through the bathroom door, and he listens to Hannibal finishing up, then coming out to pace towards him. He feels the other climbing onto the bed to lie

down beside him. His skin smells clean. No further sounds come from Hannibal, suggesting he has dozed off. But just as Will begins to allow himself to be lulled into a false sense of security, he hears the faint rustling of bed cover, followed by the tell-tale rhythm of a stroking hand. Eyes slipping open, he glances askance at those bare buttocks. At the downwards curvature of his spine as he lifts his hips to accommodate the busy movements of his fist. Travels up to the profile lying in the pillow, facing him with eyes closed and sharp lips parted to his silent breaths. Will lifts his eyes to the ceiling as Hannibal rolls slowly over onto his back. His thighs opening as he continues to pleasure himself. The right pressing against Will's left.
"Can you do that elsewhere," he utters.
"Close your eyes, Will," Hannibal pants quietly. "Wade into the quiet of the stream."
Closing his eyes, he reaches over. Catches that wrist.
"Stop."
For a moment, he listens to the other's breaths settling. Then, he feels Hannibal pulling free from his grip, and opens his eyes to see him folding his arms behind his head, his body rippling with a languid stretch. Arousal bopping gently with his movements. His chest rising and falling with a hushed sigh as hooded eyes drift to a close. Hands folding over his stomach, Will turns his eyes back to the ceiling.
"Do you think the wolf survived?" Hannibal murmurs.
"Maybe," Will answers, thinking of those yellow eyes.
"You wanted to put it out of its misery."
It's true, but Will says nothing. A pause as they lie there, listening to the silence.
"Those men used false names."
Will turns his face to regard those closed eyes.
"How do you know?"
"What nationality would you say they were."
Will thinks of the brothers' faces within the halos of their fur-trimmed hoods and the obscuring depths of their beards.
"Your first impression," says Hannibal encouragingly, and Will turns his eyes back to the ceiling.
Russian.
"If I am not mistaken," he continues to say, "they looked more like a Mikhail and Dmitry than an Antonios and Nikolaos."
Will hums in agreement.
"They also happen to be the names of the artists who painted the frescoes at the Holy Trinity."
"You think they have something to hide?" Will asks.
"Why else would you use false names."
A pause as Will recalls their conversation in the car.
"Maybe they didn't want to be traced by their wives," he utters, brows lofting.
"We have that much in common," murmurs Hannibal.

New Years Eve (i)

Chapter Notes

> Intended to be read to Един срещу друг (Edin sreshtu drug) / Against Each Other by Mihaela Marinova. A lyric-only version of the song can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSGZK-yKnik

0.00 – 0.32

Waiting for the bartender to make his drink, Will feels eyes on him and glances down the crowded bar to see a man lifting his drink in greeting. Without smiling back, Will returns his attention to the hive of activity behind the bar and picks up the glass placed before him. Before he can lift it to his lips, another man has slid up beside him along the sticky surface of the bar-top, nudging Will with his elbow.
“Hey,” he cries over the loud music. “Americanos?”
Eyes on the bottles lining the wall, Will lifts his glass.
“Yes,” he answers before swallowing down a good mouthful of the drink.
“I knew it.”
Will glances at the other’s amused expression from the corners of his eyes as he lowers the glass, licking his lips. The man looks barely twenty. He suddenly leans in towards Will.
“I buy you a drink?” he shouts into his ear, and Will leans in towards him.
“I’m with somebody,” he shouts back, and the other lofts his eyebrows, head tipping left then right as his lips turn downwards in a carefree pout.
“I don’t mind,” he says, grinning charmingly, and Will can’t stop his own brows lofting as he keeps his eyes on the other and lifts his glass again.
“I do,” he states flatly, and makes a point of turning away from the young man as he sips again at his drink.

0.33 – 0.51

Across the packed dancefloor, Will spots Hannibal. His hair raked back with a couple of longer fore tresses hanging as sharp spikes over his brow. Shirt open two buttons down. Stalking the periphery of the undulating sea of people, his razor sharp profile carves a picture of poise and prowess beneath the smouldering glow of purple and pink LED. Leaning back against the edge of the bar, Will observes the way those black eyes survey the bobbing mass of bodies in search of the brothers. Tips the glass back as he traces the length of his neck with his eyes. His scar on show.

0.52 – 1.28

Someone approaches Hannibal as he starts to cut his way through the crowd, and Will watches the tall figure looming over the latter just enough to make those hooded eyes look up. The man holds a half empty glass in his left hand as he dips his head to speak into Hannibal's ear. Will stares at the flawless line of his disconnected undercut, crowned with a crest of short and perfectly spiked dreads. His style lends him an edge which, despite his height and muscular build, would not be enough to save him. Will watches Hannibal smile politely at the man who leans in closer, his right hand slipping casually onto Hannibal's hip as he speaks into his ear again. Eyes lidding patiently, Hannibal waits until the other has finished speaking before mouthing something – excusing himself, perhaps – and starting to pull away. As he does, a hand snatches his wrist, and with an effortless flick of his arm, the man has tugged Hannibal against him as he begins to steer them to the lively break in the music. Will fixates on the grip of his hand keeping their hips pressed together as they dance. The grip of Hannibal's hand on that bicep straining against the tight sleeve of the man's tee as he allows himself to be led by the other's rhythm. He takes a sudden and intense offence at the show of passivity – the way Hannibal is seemingly humouring the other with this illusion of dominance. Almost as much as the sight of – when those swaying and obscuring bodies move just enough for him to glimpse – those long dark digits sliding down to palm Hannibal's rear.

1.29 - 2.07

Hastily swallowing the remainder of his drink, Will plonks the glass down, facing the bar. He takes a deep breath to harness the black fire beginning to lap at the edges of his brain before pushing off and heading towards Hannibal. Weaving past the hands on torsos and limbs locked in erotic engagement, Will approaches them from behind, casting a measuring eye over the other's stature. He feels Hannibal watching him – recognises the crackle of amusement in the air between them – but doesn't look over. The man is busy staring at Hannibal through his glasses. The delicate frame at odds with his physique. Unperturbed by the latter, however, Will grabs that arm. Tugging on it, he meets with an intimidating look of displeasure. Steps between the man and Hannibal regardless.
"He's with someone," he shouts, and frowning black eyebrows loft as those brown eyes give him a cool once-over.
"Who?" the man asks.
"His partner," Will answers, and the other laughs.
"Who, you?
"Yeah."
His hands have moved to his hips on their own, and he stands there with his elbows out as he looks the other over. Brown eyes hold his gaze as they attempt to stare one another down. But, buying the conviction of Will's glower, the man holds up his hands in a gesture of relent, drink still clutched in his left.
"Alright," he cries. "We was just having some fun," he adds, winking at Hannibal before lifting his glass to his lips and taking one last look at Will from the corners of his eyes as he turns from them. Will watches him slip away amongst the dancing bodies, hands still on his hips. He feels Hannibal stepping close and turns his face towards him to speak, but keeps his gaze on the crowd.

2.08 – 2.26

“How is this helping the investigation?” he shouts. Feels Hannibal leaning in to be heard.
“You question my methodology?”
Will glances at the other’s open shirt, jaw flexing.
“This is a waste of time,” he states aloud and starts to turn away when he feels something catching on his belt loops, stopping him. This time, he can feel Hannibal’s breath against his ear. The syllables stroking hot against the shell.
“It is when all you do is stare at me.”
Brow still knitted, Will slowly looks up to meet the other’s amused smile. Hooded eyes closed halfway as they regard him. Hands having moved to catch the other’s wrists, he is about to pull himself away when Hannibal tightens his grip on his belt loops and yanks him flush against himself. Their hips crashing.

2.27 – 2.45

Will grunts at the collision, but finds it difficult to pull away when the man has started moving to the zestful strain of music - the way Hannibal’s lower body rocks and pops to the rhythm with enough force to nudge his along. The energetic beat and buoyant notes are played so loud in the club, he can feel the vibrations shooting up his legs through the soles of his shoes. He feels too the faint rasp of stubble against his jaw. That ruthless aftershave flooding his senses.
“When was the last time you danced?” says Hannibal.
“I don’t,” he states woodenly, feeling the press of lips against his ear.

2.46 – 2.54

But instead of a retort, a witticism, or a cynical jab at his wedding day or other past occasions that had put his wife in his arms, Will feels Hannibal’s warm exhale stroking the shell of his ear. Keeps his head pressed close as the other sways against him. Waiting for his barbed words. *What?*

2.55 - 3.38

Then, without warning, he feels Hannibal letting go to turn around on the spot, his back pressing flush against Will’s chest as those hands reach behind him to catch on his belt loops again. He begins to arch dangerously against Will, the music around them suddenly soaring to a climax, and he snatches at those hips without knowing whether he should push the other away or pull him even closer. As the chorus leaps back to life, Hannibal begins to grind against him, his body chasing the sprinting rhythm of the music. Breath catching in his throat, Will closes his eyes. Feels the soft stroke of Hannibal’s hair as his head falls back against his shoulder. The rough graze of his stubble on his beard. The sensation of his hands letting go of Will’s trousers to slip their fingers over the ones clutching at his merciless hips. The beat is relentless. As is the man in his arms. And before he can stop himself, he is moving to the music.

New Years Eve (ii)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Before the end of the song, Will abruptly pulls away and pushes through the crowd on his way to the restroom. Hurrying inside and stepping up to the urinal, he starts to undo his trousers.
“Watch you don’t hit yourself in the eye,” says a voice, and Will looks askance to find a man stood at the other end, mid-flow. One eyebrow lofted at Will’s crotch. Zipping back up, Will turns away and heads towards a cubicle. He ignores the footsteps approaching him from behind and reaches for the door handle when a hand plants itself against the doorframe. Will meets that playful gaze from the corners of his eyes as it looks him up and down approvingly.
“I could give you a hand with that,” the man offers amiably, smiling. He speaks with an American accent and, despite his height and build, looks even younger than the Greek who had propositioned him at the bar. His eyes are bright with borrowed bravado, and Will can smell the alcohol on his breath when he speaks.
“No thank you,” Will utters as he stares ahead and puts his hand on the door handle.
“Are you sure?” the boy asks, stepping through Will’s personal space to close a hand over his wrist. His other hand moving to palm the front of Will’s trousers. Snatching the other’s wrist, Will looks him sternly in the eye.
“I’m sure,” he says lowly, pushing his hand away and turning to walk to another cubicle. But those footsteps follow him, and when he turns around to confront the boy again, he feels hands grabbing the front of his shirt. Sees blue eyes gazing heatedly into him as he’s shoved against the cubicle door which swings back beneath their weight. With a grunt, Will falls back against the door as it crashes against the wall, the boy pressing into him bodily to keep him pinned. Blinking slowly to ground himself, Will looks towards the restroom door.
“Get out before it gets ugly, he says lowly.
“You think I’m ugly?” the boy breathes against his jaw, the fumes of intoxication invading Will’s nostrils.
“I think you need to back off.”
“Everyone says I’m gorgeous,” he continues to murmur, and Will feels a finger tracing the line of his scar. Inhaling, he catches the other’s wrist before he can grab his crotch again.
“They won’t be saying that if you don’t back off,” he says warningly. His erection having long waned, he is growing increasingly impatient with this place – with this whole situation he has found himself in.
“You’re hot when you’re angry,” the boy sighs, pressing his lips to Will’s cheek. Jaw setting, Will grabs his throat and pushes off the door. As the other’s back hits the opposing cubicle wall, they hear the sound of the restroom door swinging open.
“The fuck you think you’re doing?” a voice barks. Both Will and the boy look in its direction to find an older man with a built upper body and narrow waist stood across from them. Tattoos wrap themselves busily around the tanned skin of his arms which he holds defensively out at his sides.
“Babe,” the boy begins to say, pushing off Will’s hand, but Will sees the flexing of the other man’s jaw, and prepares himself as he storms determinedly towards them. Strong hands seize fistfuls of his shirt, tugging him towards that angry scowl. His aftershave is overpowering.
“I said,” he growls through his teeth. “The fuck do you think you’re doing?”

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“Where’s your partner?” asks a familiar voice, and Hannibal lowers the glass from his lips.
“Restroom,” he replies, turning his face to watch the other approaching. No beverage in his hand this

time, and no fake prescription glasses perched on the bridge of his nose. Hannibal watches him lean his elbows on the bar beside him, mirroring his stance. His body arching languidly as he tilts his head and studies Hannibal through lidded eyes. His expression inspiring thoughts of a youthful Jack Crawford – if Jack had been partial to the gym and rakish hipster haircuts. Yet the man had needed neither when he last gave Hannibal an admittedly sound walloping, much to his own disgust, and the memory of his disgrace brings an involuntary twitch to the corner of his lips until he must mask it with another sip of his drink.
“Been gone a while,” the man states. Maintaining eye contact, Hannibal continues to tip the glass higher until he has swallowed the last of his beverage and exhales quietly afterwards.
“You’ve been watching me,” he says, licking his lips as he puts the glass down to one side and resumes leaning against the bar on his elbows. Those black eyebrows loft as that dark gaze looks him over unapologetically, settling to stare at Hannibal’s scar through his long lashes. The most boyish feature on an otherwise rugged specimen of an African-American man in his early thirties. He would most likely look underaged without his neatly groomed facial hair.
“Been watching that bad man scar,” he says with a nod in Hannibal’s direction.
“Do you have any?”
“Nah. I’m a good boy.”
Brown eyes meet his mischievously before returning to scrutinise his throat.
“Did it hurt?”
“Not really.”
“Can I touch it?”
But his hand is already reaching before Hannibal can reply, and he watches the curious look in the other’s eyes as he slips his fingers around his neck and strokes the rough pad of his thumb gently over the tender scar tissue.
“So what,” he utters. “You some Russian mobster or something?”
“You got me.”
“You and homeboy got matching scars.”
“He’s a cop.”
“For real?”
"It's complicated."
"Maybe you like being under authority..."
A playful tug at the corner of those generous lips as he tightens his grip on Hannibal's throat in a pretend strangle.
“You’d best keep your hands to yourself,” says a voice, and he watches the smile fade on the other's lips as the hand releases him. Pushing off the edge of the bar, the man stands up straight to face Will. Hannibal doesn’t need to look over to see the expression on Will’s face.
“Or what?”
“You don’t want to know.”
He sounds angry. An angry wolf taking on a grizzly bear. Hannibal turns his face towards the busy bartenders and manages to catch the eye of one who leans across to take his order. As he pulls away, Hannibal fishes the pen from his shirt pocket and slips a clean serviette from behind the bar.
“What's a pig like you doing here anyway?”
"Pig."
"Yeah, pig. You get off fucking criminals or some shit?"
"Am I throwing myself at you just now?"
The man scoffs, shaking his head and sucking his teeth in disbelief. As he’s about to take a step towards Will, Hannibal moves in the way, stopping him with a hand to his chest. Eyes still on Will past Hannibal’s shoulder, the man takes the serviette and ends the staring contest to look down at the number scrawled in biro.

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The air is cold outside, and a breeze cards its fingers through his curls as he strides past people making their way to the club, their arms around each other's shoulders, heads lowered to suggestive utterances passing from lips to ears, or thrown back to fill the night air with cries of mirth and raucous laughter. Despite the flurry of white clouds exhaled by the multitude crowding this busy area of the city, nobody seems to take any notice of the harsh winter temperature as they hurry to make themselves known to the next doorman. Behind him, the blasting strains of another club remix escapes from the establishment to hound his fleeing steps along the harbour. It reflects something of the noise inside his head, until the rhythm seems to pound in tandem to the vein pulsing faintly in his temple. His foul mood the results of a continuing concoction more unpleasant than that of the chemicals coursing through his veins.

To start, he shouldn't have stayed this long. His entire time in the club, he felt restless and uncomfortable drawing what seemed like endless attention from one stranger to the next. He didn't like the fact that he felt urged to act in the face of audacity, which seemed rife amongst that particular segment of people with their relentless attempts to assert dominance over others. He wouldn't consider himself homophobic per say, but that fight in the restroom had been the final straw. Until he saw the man he'd previously confronted. With his hand on Hannibal's throat. Through the fading yet lingering wave of music, he hears the clatter of footsteps pursuing in his direction, and is ready to release some of his unbridled adrenaline when he starts to recognise the rhythm and weight of those shoes hitting the ground, together with the sound of his soft panting as he catches up to him.

"Good luck with that," Will scoffs lowly without slowing down his pace.
"After yours? Easy."
He bristles at the compliment that nonetheless pales to the sudden image of a writhing back and black fingers clutching his throat, laying claim to something beyond his understanding even as he forces that body open with his huge-
"I'm not another homosexual for you to bait," he snaps, unintentionally spitting the word homosexual.
"What does being homosexual have to do with it?"
"So why were we even looking in there?"
They're about to walk into a group of singing friends, but instead of moving out of their way, Will shoulders his way through them, ignoring their cries of complaint as he carries on walking without knowing where exactly he is going. Hannibal soon catches up with him again, and falls back into pace at his side.
"The brothers seem like the fun seeking type. People were having fun in there."
"Like you," Will utters as he stares down the promenade.
"Were you not?"
Will does not reply to Hannibal's flippant tone.
"Tell me, Will. When you danced with your wife on your wedding day, did you also come close to ejaculating on the dancefloor?"
Will remains silent, his jaw flexing.
"If that's not considered fun, I don't know what is," Hannibal adds amusedly, and there is a pause as they continue walking a step out of tune with every other body ambling leisurely towards them, people enjoying one another's company beneath the lively ambience generated by bright lighting illuminating from below the trees lining the promenade and above in ordered rows of modern red and white streetlights. Their colours bleeding across the black undulating waters stretching out into the horizon.
"Perhaps the company of women will ease your inhibitions," Hannibal says appeasingly. "A large gathering of men can be intimidating for some."
"Whatever."
"You sound angry, Will."
No reply.
"I didn't really give him my number."

A pause before he adds brightly, “I gave him yours, thinking you might enjoy having a little fun to yourself, seeing as you felt left out.”
“I wasn’t the one,” Will begins to force through his teeth but stops himself. He senses Hannibal waiting expectantly for him to finish. So he doesn’t.
“Pasidžiauk, mano piktas mažasis vilkas,” chuckles Hannibal softly as he puts his arm around Will’s shoulders and tugs him playfully against himself. Bumping into him, Will shoves a hand against his chest, fingers grazing the curls of his chest hair as he pushes him away. Unperturbed, Hannibal steps in again to hook his arm around Will’s neck, pulling him close enough for the sides of their heads to press together.
“Tai Naujųjų Metų išvakarės ir mes dar nežudėme vienas kito,” he says happily. It is cold. They don’t have coats, and Hannibal is warm against him. A couple walks past, the male’s arm tucked around the female’s waist. Will folds his arms around himself as he steps away from the contact.
“Dar ne,” he utters, staring ahead as they continue to walk. Beside him, Hannibal hums thoughtfully as he lifts his arms and clasps the back of his head with his hands.
“Tiesa,” he exhales, breath misting in the air as he tips his head back to smile with lidded eyes at the sky. “Dar yra laiko.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

“Nenusiminkite, mano piktas mažasis vilkas” - "Cheer up, my angry little wolf"
“Tai Naujųjų Metų išvakarės ir mes dar nežudėme vienas kito” - "It's New Year's Eve and we haven't killed each other yet"
"Dar ne" - "Not yet"
"Tiesa. Dar yra laiko" - "True. There is still time"

New Years Eve (iii)

Chapter Notes

The scene in the nightclub is intended to be read to the Stonebridge House remix of Neyo's Closer. A shortened version of the remix can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iA_ckSIAg8

“She likes you,” says Hannibal from where he leans against the edge of the bar. Will looks in the same direction to find a young woman in her early twenties watching them as she dances.
“Maybe she likes you,” he replies, taking a sip from his glass as he observes the way she moves. Slender legs made the longer by high heels.
“Maybe she likes the both of us,” Hannibal states, and Will glances beside him at the other’s amused expression. Black eyes warmed by drink as they gaze upon the people through the veil of his lashes. It could be the new alcoholic beverage in his hand, but he feels more at ease here, stood with Hannibal on the side-lines. More in control and ready if someone is to approach them. It helps not being hounded by other men, also. He doesn’t have to be on edge, waiting for another challenge to his masculinity. To chase away another strutting peacock too busy preening to realise the object of their attentions wishes to peel the skin from their bodies. As did he, whenever he saw someone laying an arrogant hand on something beyond their understanding. Every inch of his skin a story that only few are privy to. And beyond that, those which only Will can know. Can ever come close to understanding.
“Hi,” greets the girl as she slips between them to lean against the bar, her arms folding on the edge as she arches her body appealingly. Will watches Hannibal cast his measuring eye down the line of her back as she returns the favour by looking him over. Her dark eyes bright and lively beneath the heavy

sweep of her false lashes.
“Hi,” echoes Hannibal with a smile, and Will meets her gaze when he feels her watching him.
“Hi,” he echoes without smiling, hand still clutching the glass.
“Where you from?” she asks, studying Will’s face. Taking in his scar as he takes in her Greek accent.
“Everywhere,” he answers, taking a sip of his drink.
“Everywhere?”
“We travel a lot because of our work,” adds Hannibal, and the girl turns her head to regard him curiously.
“What job?”
“Business,” Will utters, drawing those large eyes back onto himself.
“I know this,” she says excitedly, laying her hand on his arm. “You dress like businessmen. So smart and sexy. I love it,” she giggles, turning her face to smile at Hannibal before looking back at Will.
“And I like this too,” she adds, touching his face with a finger, the point of her manicured talon stroking his scar. “You look like dangerous man,” she says lowly. “My favourite.”
Suddenly, a loud collective cheer from the crowd heralds the next remix as it is introduced seamlessly by the DJ into the heaving room.
“I love this song!” the girl cries enthusiastically, taking hold of their hands. “Dance with me?” she implores sweetly, and Hannibal pushes off the bar as Will holds back. “Your friend is shy?” she asks as they step towards the dancefloor.
“He likes to watch,” answers Hannibal, a smile tugging at the corner of his lips as he glances back at Will.

As the girl and Hannibal begin to dance, Will’s eyes start playing tricks on him. Beneath the subdued lighting, he sees Abigail. Her long brown hair swaying as she laughs in Hannibal’s arms. Her eyes, creased at the corners with mirth, are bright and full of life. Then she looks over. As does Hannibal. And together, they beckon to him with their expectant glances. Closing his eyes, Will opens them again to see the girl dancing with her back against Hannibal’s chest. His hands on her waist as she moves seductively against him. Will senses Abigail at his side, leaning in to whisper into his ear. *Go*. Black meets blue, and for a second time that evening, Will cannot say no. He does not look away as he downs his drink and makes his way towards them. Does not look away when he is stood amongst the crowd, his hands finding her hips as her arms wrap around his neck. He watches Hannibal watching him from behind the girl as she presses her lips to his. As he lets her coax his mouth open with the soft press of her own, and accepts, with a sudden recklessness inspired by having possession of Hannibal’s full attention, the little pill on the tip of her tongue.

With the music pounding in their ears and vibrating through their bodies from their feet up, the three of them dance in sync – the girl’s fluid movements being absorbed into their bodies pressing tightly against her like a pair of clasped hands smothering a flame. There is no escape as they fight for possession, Hannibal pulling her to face him, making her arch her body against his whilst simultaneously grinding her rear into Will. Hannibal pressing deeper against the girl as she kisses him, forcing her to press harder into Will who clenches his jaw and emits a low growl as he tugs the girl away from Hannibal and claims her for himself, his teeth catching her bottom lip as she braces her hands against his chest. His own hands sliding down her sides until they find Hannibal’s sat on her hips, refusing to relinquish their hold. Slipping his hands over the other’s, Will catches his wrists, thumbs pressing near the scars for his hidden pulse beneath the skin. Seeking the strong beat of his heart. A reminder that Hannibal is here, alive, and with him still.

Soon, the ambiguous chemicals seep into the crevices of his brain, summoning forth the most potent of repressed memories, and as Will lets them dictate the journey, he finds them stood on the bluff once again. Holding one another as they pant for their breaths. The scent of blood in the wind-tossed air between them. The taste of it fresh and potent on their tongues. Blue staring into black as black stares back with unbearable intensity. Blink, and they’re back in the forest as his eyes grow unfocused to the

magnetic pull of Melissa's voice calling to that unbridled part of him. He hears Hannibal speak his name, breaking the trance as he makes his claim on Will known to the rest of hell and its acting ministers, and in answer to his call, Will releases the dark red torrent, lets it run wild and free as it cascades onto the countless dead and overlapping leaves spanning the forest floor. Staring into Hannibal as he does this. As he feels the other pressing his hand onto the bottle over Richard's fingers, and with an unspoken understanding, he pushes down at the same time as Hannibal before they drag the glass across Richard's throat. Their lips agape as they pant from their exertion. Will twitching all over from the grip of his fever. Their eyes a mirror to one another's brimming exaltation. To the seething black fountain of Hannibal's throbbing adoration. Writhing and bubbling forth from the uncharted depths of Will's own pupils to slowly consume every inch of wavering blue.

Look again, and Will gasps from the sudden loss of air in his lungs and the sharp pain lancing through his chest as he stares at those hooded eyes which gaze distractedly at Daniel. He hisses in a voice he doesn't quite recognise. *Look at me*. The blood roaring in his ears as though he has been abandoned at the bottom of the sea. The pain lessening as he opens Daniel's throat and watches his blood baptising the tight line of his lips and his fair and fluttering lashes. Its alleviation coming at the sight of those lips parting as they let slip a ragged sigh of devoted veneration. His approval lapped up instantly by the panting beast wearing Will's skin – a starved and frenzied thing that wants, and wants, even whilst it rages with the compulsion to savage the very thing it desires.

Confused and lost as to which it needs more, Will finally sees himself approaching the naked Spaniard from behind. Each step he takes across the dimly lit bedroom bringing him closer to the man holding Hannibal captive with his hands behind his back. A sleeping mask covering his eyes as he faces the bed. The Spaniard's cock jutting out from his body, swollen with anticipation as he stands behind Hannibal. Taking the final step towards them, Will snatches the man's head with the crook of his arm and delivers him from his own impudence. There is barely time for his blood to fleck Hannibal's skin before his body drops lifelessly to the ground, and as Hannibal begins to turn around at the sensation, he is tackled down onto the bed by Will. Blindly, he fights Will for possession of the knife, eventually rolling on top of him. Lying with his chest heaving beneath Hannibal, Will groans through his teeth at the sensation of his hot body pressing into him from above. One of his hands dart down spasmodically to clasp a bare arsecheek, his fingers clawing hungrily at the plush flesh. As they continue to fight over the knife, Will sees Hannibal reaching for the sleeping mask with his free hand. Snatching his wrist, Will tries to stop him, but isn't fast enough. He swallows against the hard knot leaping into his throat as the mask comes away and those eyes stare imperiously down at him. In his peripheral vision, he suddenly sees Abigail. Lying with her head on the pillow beside him.

As he stares up into black, he feels her hand slipping over his, as cold and heavy as marble. Hannibal brings his face down as he clasps a hand over both Will's and Abigail's. Then, slowly, and with overwhelming strength, he and Abigail begin to direct the knife in Will's hand. Together, they move it towards Hannibal's throat as he leans closer within reach. His body arching hard against Will's, pinning him to the bed with his hips as the sharp point hovers over his scar. Lips parting, Will starts to stammer as he had done that night the rainwater plastered his curls to his skull. His heart hammering anxiously against his ribs as, powerless against their conviction, he shakes his head, the movement jerky with fear. One hand still clutching at Hannibal's silken skin – the fingers digging in hard enough to draw blood. Smiling, Hannibal lids his eyes at him; his supercilious expression falling away to unguarded affection. And Will can do nothing but watch as the glinting point of the knife sinks into scar tissue and runs its course, finishing what Daniel had started, dragging along with it Will's violently surging arousal as he beholds, through lashes batting frantically against the scorching spray, the euphoric expression transforming Hannibal's face. A sound catches in the back of his throat, and what should have been a transcendent cry of pleasured release comes out a strangled whimper of regret as he witnesses the light beginning to wane in his eyes.

He returns abruptly to the room and the deafening music, uncertain whether he had cried out, yet knowing the sound would have been lost to anyone else even if he had. Except for Hannibal. Who is nowhere to be seen. And for a heartbeat, Will experiences the disorientating suggestion that the other had never been here at all as his eyes start roving around the packed space of the nightclub. Then the intimate press of the girl's body against his own distracts him enough to turn his anxious gaze onto her pretty face. Awareness returning to him piece by piece. The weight and shape of her buttocks in his hands, despite his not remembering moving them there. Her false nails pressing into his chest where her hands lay splayed against him. His arousal pressing into her despite the cold sweat that had broken over his skin just as he was freed from whatever drug-inspired vision he was forced to ride out. The girl smiles as she slips a hand onto his nape, pulling him closer so she can shout into his ear.
"Do you want to get out of here? Your friend said he'll be waiting."
Relief pools into his chest – *he has not left me* – as the renewed anticipation of sexual conquest reinforces another part of his body rather uncomfortably. He wants, with a sudden and unexpected urgency, for him and Hannibal to have sex with this girl. A way for both of them to seek a relatively easy and uncomplicated pleasure. To find a form of release that is not driven by the melting pot of everything that is to be felt between them but addressed by neither. Forever too hot to handle and painful to the touch.

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Sat in the back of the taxi with the girl, Will lets her kiss and stroke him until it becomes too heated. Breaking from her lips for air, he pushes her back gently, swallowing as she trails her hand down his chest to palm his ache that throbs at the thought of Hannibal waiting for them in the dim of their room. Catching her bottom lip between her teeth, she watches him from beneath her lashes as she kneads him expertly with a hand, making him arch against the upholstery, his head tipping back against the headrest as she leans closer to bite onto his lip the same time he bites back a quiet moan.
"Slow down," he breathes, taking her wrist and pulling her hand away from his lap. But slipping her hand free from his grasp, she catches his and presses it over her breast as she brings her face close to kiss him again.
"That's a pretty necklace," he says before her lips touches his, and she leans back, looking down at her chest.
"This?" she says a little breathlessly, hand moving to the little gold locket dangling on a thin chain encircling her neck. "Is more pretty inside," she giggles, fumbling with her false nails. Helping her, Will takes the locket into his hands and carefully prises it open.
"She's beautiful, no?" the girl sighs happily as Will looks at the tiny portrait being washed over by the intermittent waves of street lighting shining in through the car windows. "Just like her mama."

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As they reach the top of the stairs, the girl suddenly pushes Will against the door. She barely gives him time to regain his step as she hurls herself bodily into him, her mouth over his to swallow up his grunt from the impact. Hand moving to the door handle, he pushes down without realising someone is doing the same on the other side, and stumbles backwards as the door abruptly gives way. He falls into a pair of arms as the girl breaks their kiss to look up.
"Starting without me?" greets a familiar voice. "Naughty."
Will feels himself and the girl still pressing against his chest being pulled up into a stand. Looking over his shoulder, Will meets Hannibal's amused gaze as the girl keeps her hold on the front of his shirt. Turning them on the spot, she steps back against Hannibal's chest while pulling Will close, effectively sandwiching herself between their bodies again.
"Not me," she purrs, stroking her body against them simultaneously as she brings her arms up to wrap behind Hannibal's head. "I'm a good girl," she adds, writhing sensually against them until Will must snatch her hips to ease the friction with a suppressed grunt. Those black eyes continue to watch him

as Hannibal leans the side of his head against hers. His hands trailing down her arms, then sides, before settling over Will's hands on her hips.
"Is that the truth?" he asks, voice low.
"Why don't you find out?" the girl asks in return, taking one of Hannibal's hands and steering it onto her thigh, then up the hem of her figure-hugging dress.
"We like taking our time," murmurs Hannibal, hand gripping the soft flesh of her leg just beneath the hem.
"You like a tease?" she exhales excitedly, and Will feels the burning scrutiny of Hannibal's eyes on his face as the hand over his drags higher on her hip, hitching up the dress to expose the transparent triangle of her underwear.
"We love being teased," Hannibal continues to murmur lowly into her ear as Will watches those ruthless fingers twist the flimsy front of her panties into a tight lacy cord. "It drives us crazy," he says through his teeth, tugging sharply on the thong until it digs into her sex, making her gasp.
Swallowing, Will tears his eyes away and detaches himself with a step back, hand running through his hair as he knits his brow at the other's indifferent expression. "We need to talk," he utters, taking a step towards the bathroom. Glancing askance, he meets those lidded eyes.
"Do we?" says Hannibal in quiet challenge. His hand moving again until the girl arches desperately against him with a whimper. Her arms wound tight around his neck. Jaw flexing, Will stands his ground.
"Yes."
Without waiting for a response, he continues to the bathroom. Behind him, he hears the girl mewling in protest.
"Where are you going?"
"We'll be right back. Be a good girl."
"Okay, daddy."
Pushing open the door, Will steps quickly into the bathroom to escape the rapidly suffocating atmosphere.

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Sat on the edge of the bath, he watches Hannibal checking himself in the mirror above the sink.
"Can't it wait?" he utters, voice quiet.
"Why?" says Hannibal without looking away from his reflection. "You like this girl?"
Will lowers his gaze to the tiled floor. Grinds his teeth slowly in consideration. Feeling the weight of the growing silence between them, he folds his arms. Braces himself inwardly.
"She has a child," he states reluctantly, voice still hushed. Glancing up, he sees Hannibal watching him impassively. *And?* He knows it is a poor case, and he only has himself to blame for not realising the other's intentions sooner, but he does not feel comfortable going ahead with it. Lips still agape as he struggles to find adequate words, Will finally resorts to begging.
"Please," he says quietly, frowning up at Hannibal, and for a moment, all he does is stare back at Will. His expression blank and unreadable. Those sharp lips part, then close again. And when Hannibal returns his attention to the sink, Will sees the subtle undulation in his throat through the open collar of his shirt. The tap comes on, the splash of water against porcelain making it difficult to hear Hannibal's brief utterance.
"That again."
Turning off the tap, he shakes his hands and runs one through his hair as he studies himself in the mirror. He does not look over as Will rises to a stand. He begins to utter the other's name, but Hannibal stops him with a look. Devoid of any readable emotion, it is reminiscent of the old days, when it was clear which side of the glass they had stood.
"Stay here," Hannibal commands coolly, hands beginning to undo the buttons of his shirt as he turns away from Will and walks towards the door. Stood alone in the bathroom, Will watches the door close behind him, shutting Hannibal's figure from his sight.

Thing of Darkness

When he had first set foot on Greece, it was with a mixture of trepidation and necessity not entirely dissimilar to when he had arrived in Florence with Abigail. However, there are differences which suggest – if not exactly a lack of progress because Will cannot give a definition for what progress means exactly in his relationship with Hannibal – they may have been venturing backwards since their one step forward off the cliff's edge. The door they had opened that night with the death of Francis Dolarhyde was apparently shut again by Will when he made the choice to end it all. And yet, in one fickle heartbeat, he'd put one foot in the threshold. Kept that door ajar in an act of instinct, and to what cost, he had selfishly refused to consider.

He had believed, at first, that his proposal to channel the torrent of Hannibal's murderous intentions would come at no cost to anyone but those whose disappearance would be beneficial in the bigger picture. Had believed that, in this unofficial partnership of theirs, he could better understand and harness that feeling he'd discovered on the bluff. And Hannibal had let him slip the collar of morality over his neck, letting Will believe he could keep him on a short lead. Now, without the wind whistling in his ears and the weight of gravity pulling him to his death, or the urgency of a battle for survival against dragons – or the more recent, erratic and confusing corporeal distractions – Will begins to suspect it is Hannibal who has been keeping him on a short lead. One that appears to be growing ever the shorter the more he struggles and resists.

Stood with his hands on the edges of the sink, he looks up at his own reflection. Recalls doing the same in the bathroom of that motel when, covered in sweat and panting hard for his breath, he had watched his own startled expression shatter and fall away a piece at a time. Since being with Hannibal again, it is as though he is in a constant state of thwarted metamorphosis. Aware, at all times, of the pulsations straining against the surface fissures. The supposed pieces of himself that he tries to hold together against all odds. And they have largely remained intact, he believes, despite the trials of being with the other. With only two moments having come close to truly threatening the core of his composure.

The first, when he had killed Daniel in a fit of jealousy. The second, when Hannibal had spurned the limitations of their arrangement – Will's moral compromise – in the show of hunting alone. Or at least, he suspects Hannibal's murder in Italy to have been as much about making a statement to Will, as it was about responding to another murderer. Suspects the other did it in part to gain a reaction from him. Not realising, or uncaring of the fact that his attempt to anger or hurt Will would in turn expose his own afflictions. A chink in the defensive armour he wears not for the enemy, but something he keeps closer to heart. Regardless, Hannibal had orchestrated Daniel's death, and, even though he must have faltered at the prospect of Will's escape back to his family, mistaken or otherwise, he knew he still had Will attached to his line. Because the hook is lodged deep; they both know this much. Will is reminded of this understanding every time he meets Hannibal's gaze. And yet, with or without the manipulation, it all remains a game of tug of war in the dark. Of giving and taking without really knowing how much or when, still. All his life, he has never known such contradiction. Such anxiety. Such *inexplicable desire*.

A sudden cry erupts from the other side of the door. Facing the mirror, he stares searchingly at his own reflection, heart beginning to pound in his chest as he deliberates. Gripping the edges of the sink, he shuts his eyes as he listens closely for further sounds. Stops waiting after a fraction of a second to stride over and tug open the door before stepping hurriedly out into the bedroom.

He finds Hannibal and the girl naked in front of the bed. The former standing as he carries the latter's weight in his arms like it is nothing. Her own are wrapped around his neck. Her legs around his waist. Each hard snap of his hips making her whimper as her body jerks and arches from the force of his thrusts. Hair swishing, breasts bouncing upon her chest, she stares through her lashes at Hannibal who stares back from beneath his half-drawn lids, his sharp lips agape to his panting – quiet and composed in contrast to the fevered gasps tumbling from the open circle of her mouth. Releasing the breath he had been holding, Will fixes his gaze on the desk and walks towards it whilst steering clear of their copulating bodies.

Sitting down in the chair, he opens the bottom drawer and removes an unopened bottle. Pushes it shut before leaning back and twisting open the lid. Lifting the mouth to his lips, he knocks it back as the room continues to fill with the sounds of exertion. The sharp thwack of skin on skin. The obscene glide of a hard cock into a woman's slick. He listens because he has to, even if he feels the familiar tug of arousal in the pit of his stomach. Knows it is at odds with his concern for the girl's welfare, which in itself is at odds with the pleasure she appears to be enjoying.

Suddenly, the girl cries out in surprise, and Will breaks for air from the bottle, turning in the chair to the sound of her body hitting the bed cover. Hannibal has one hand on the ankle he has pinned against his shoulder, and another around her throat.

"Yes," the girl pants, clutching at his wrist with both her hands as Hannibal builds his pace. "Please," she begs breathlessly as she stares up at him. "Harder."

Swallowing, Will slowly lowers the bottle. His eyes on that arse as Hannibal doubles his efforts with a grunt, forcing a whimper from the girl. The sound of her struggling breaths in his ears. Putting down the bottle, Will opens another drawer. Takes out the knife and stands up from the chair.

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Unable to scream against the grip of his fingers, her orgasm makes itself known physically as her body clenches around him like a vice. The pleasurable sensation abruptly interrupted by the press of a knife to his throat. The threat of it sends a sharp thrill through his body as the familiar scent of his arousal makes his nostrils flare.

"Put your hands behind your back," he commands, voice dangerously low and similar in tone to when he had spoken rudely to the man at the club. Hannibal keeps his hand on the girl's throat as she rides out the final waves of pleasure, her body continuing to massage him with her convulsions. He feels the heat radiating off the other's body as he steps closer to him from behind, but stops short from touching him.

"Put your hands behind your back," he repeats slowly through his teeth, and Hannibal feels the sharp point of the knife pressing into his scar tissue. Waits until it begins sinking into his skin before finally letting go of her throat with a hiss of pain. Doing as he is told, he feels a hand grab his wrists and tug him backwards, his penis pulling out from the relaxing grip of her body to press into the cover as he is shoved down onto the bed beside the girl. Lying there on his stomach, he knows he is being watched. Can almost feel those blue eyes searing a trail over his skin, and cannot help arching his spine to the imagined sensation. His erection digging into the bedding as his lips part to the slow inhale and exhale of anticipation.

Then he hears a decisive intake of breath being snatched through the nose, and feels the jab of the knife as that grip on his wrists tighten before he's forced further up the bed. Feels the rub of his trousers against the backs of his thighs as he's pushed forward by the other's legs. The stroke of the garment against his skin as his knees are nudged apart. Turning his face towards the girl, he watches

her happy expression as she rolls onto her back with a sated sigh, eyes closed, lips parted to the weight of alcohol and sexual release pulling her fast into oblivion. There is no rest for the wicked, however, as he listens to the hurried fumbling of belt buckle and zip. The tell-tale metallic click and rasp of teeth, the rustling of shirt being pushed aside to make way for the silent menace that makes itself known. Chomping at the bit and frothing its fury.

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Sucking saliva against his tongue, Will lowers his face and spits onto himself. The glob of gleaming film that manages to land on his flesh is scant – his agitated breaths having left his lips and the inside of his mouth dry. But it can't wait. Not with his wrists pinned to his lower back and held prisoner above the plush globes of his arse, the muscles of which had been bunching hard to the battering ram of his thrusts mere moments ago. The flesh of which will jump even more helplessly than the girl's had done as the impact of Will's wrath sends its tremors through his captive body. Tossing the knife onto the ground, he grabs himself by the base and leans forward, one knee shifting on the bed to press against the outside of the other's. Pushing his weight onto those wrists, he guides himself towards Hannibal. Watches with heaving chest, the fat head of his cock sinking between his arsecheeks and feeling it butting bluntly against his entrance. Hannibal resists him, and the subtle stroke of his clenching hole over his throbbing crown is all the spur he needs to set the beast free.

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He feels Will start suddenly to push into him and flexes his jaw as he tenses up. Delights in the other's growl of frustration as Will presses forward doggedly – his perseverance eventually breaking through the taunting barrier of Hannibal's body to wrench a gasp from both their lips. The pain hits him upon entry like a punch to the gut, and he exhales against the sheets as he feels Will's large and bulbous head pulsating in his rectum. Hard muscle flexing against the constricting ring of his anus for barely a heartbeat before a hand grabs the back of his head and pushes his face into the bed. He feels Will looming over him, leaning all his weight into his wrists, forcing the air from his lungs as Hannibal arches beneath his grip.

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A deep groan spills from his lips uncontrollably as he forces himself inside Hannibal. His body tight and unyielding, and ready to split from the lack of preparation as Will cleaves him open dry with his girth. His saliva having long evaporated like the bittersweet nothings murmured into his ear by the other throughout the years. Knees digging into the bed, he stares down at the vulgar brand marking his skin. Slowly pulls out and grunts excitedly as he slams back in, the sudden force of it making those hooded eyes snap shut as Hannibal exclaims softly in pain. The sound reaching his ears like sweet music as it combines with the sight of him lying with his cheek pressed to the bed. His mouth open helplessly as his face twists in discomfort. It's enough to make Will come.

"*Goddamnit*," he grits through his teeth, hand pressing harder against Hannibal's skull as his fingers snatch at the soft tresses of his hair. Closing his hand into a cruel fist, Will tugs to bring his face off the bed the same time he drags himself out. Pauses just before the tip escapes. Then shoves back inside.

"Ah!" Hannibal cries, his voice coarse and diminished as it struggles against Will's iron grip forcing his head back and stretching his throat taut.

"Fuck," Will groans in response, driven by the sound of the other's voice to do it again. And again. Each deep stab of his cock forcing another choked cry of pain from the man beneath him until he

wants nothing more than to throw his head back like an animal. Eventually, the scent of blood penetrates the air, and he pauses – chest heaving, mouth agape – to look down belatedly.

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He feels Will falling still mid-thrust, the grip on his hair lessening enough for him to lean his cheek against the cover as he looks back at him from the corners of his eyes. Sees the knot of concern in his brow. Eyes downcast. Licking his lips, Hannibal swallows drily.

"Don't," he pants, waiting for blue eyes to meet the heated slits of his own black gaze. Half-drawn with feigned exhaustion. Mouth hanging open to his shallow breathing. Before the mist dissipates further from the surface of those eyes, Hannibal clenches hard. And as Will gasps, he spears him fatally with a helpless expression. "Stop, Will," he whispers breathily.

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Don't. Something inside him shifts. *Stop, Will*. Wakens. *Don't stop, Will*. And losing all sense of himself – of the empath's remorse – he moves. Fucks Hannibal until the latter whimpers uncharacteristically. The blood roaring in his ears and rushing through his veins as his heart pounds fit to bursting. Bloodlust whipping his hips into a frenzy as their bodies slap brutally against one another. The bruising grip of both his hands on Hannibal's wrists tugging the other back onto his shaft each time his thrusts slam him forward. His cock ramming that streaming pucker until Will swears he can hear the man sob. *You want this?* The sound of him. *Yeah?* The smell of him. *Take it.* The feel of him. *Take it, Hannibal.* It's all too much, and he comes harder than he has ever done.

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The pain combines exquisitely with the savage pummelling of his prostate, and despite the copious flow of pre-ejaculate, there remains enough fluid in his punished body to be pumped with startling force from the swollen head of his penis. The hard spurts of his release are restrained by latex as Will's slumped form pins him to the bed. The sodden front of his shirt sticking to the slick planes of Hannibal's back. Against which he can feel the pounding of Will's heart pushing like a terrified animal against his ribs. And the hot blow of his shuddering pants against his sweat slick nape.

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He feels the other's body sliding away beneath his cheek, and lifts his head as Hannibal pulls himself off his softening cock and drags himself up the bed to collapse slowly against the pillows. The blood streaking his skin and staining the sheets has yet to dry, but Hannibal doesn't seem to notice as he lies there with his eyes closed. Arms clutching loosely at a pillow. Will's penis is covered and tacky to the touch as he half-heartedly puts himself away and zips back up his clinging trousers. Stood there at the foot of the bed, he looks at the girl sleeping soundly on the right. At Hannibal lying on the left, pulling off the spent condom. Then, leaning down to take off his shoes, he climbs slowly onto the bed and lies down on his back between them. Face turning towards Hannibal, he watches the back of his head. Stands at the closed door of the other's mind palace as he waits for the animal in his skin to settle.

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When he wakes in the middle of the night, it is with the realisation that the old year has ended and the new has already begun. It is also with the sensation of a body spooning his own from behind. The weight of an arm against his waist. The stroke of a calm, sleeping breath against the back of his ear. Slowly, he rolls over and is greeted by the sight of his sleeping face. The drawn eyebrows a familiar

picture of his constant restlessness. *No sleep for the wicked*. A slender arm is slung over his waist, and beyond the reposing shape of him, Hannibal is reminded of the presence of their temporary paramour. Returning his gaze to that troubled countenance, he puts a hand on the arm confining him, and slowly pushes. Instinctively, the limb cinches tighter around him, preventing escape. A smile lifts his lips without him knowing, his eyes falling to a half close as he studies that face. *Ah, misshapen knave*. The face of Will Graham. *Had plotted with them to take my life*. His gaze lingers on the other's mouth in memory of his teeth catching his lip as they first fucked in that toilet cubicle. The first time he willingly gave Hannibal a taste of his capacity for carnal cruelty. *This thing of darkness*. After a moment of deliberation, he gradually leans his face closer. Watches that mouth as his own draws near. *This thing of darkness...* Eyes closing, he breathes in Will's exhale with a parting of his lips. *...I acknowledge mine*.

"Mmm…"

Stopping, he slowly opens his eyes at the sound of her voice.

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Will opens his eyes to Hannibal's sleeping face. Realising he had fallen asleep, he slowly untangles himself from the other and sits up in the bed lit up by the light of the moon glaring in through the balcony. With a sudden unease, he looks beside him. At the cold and empty space where the girl had lain. In his peripheral vision, he senses a shape which hadn't been there before, just beyond the moon's reach. Slowly, he pushes the bedding aside and climbs out of the bed.

As he approaches the chair, the first thing he does is check her pulse. Then, his eyes fall on the abandoned syringe lying on the floor beneath her extended arm, and he stoops to pick it up. He hears the quiet rustle of sheets from behind, and looks over his shoulder to see Hannibal sitting up in the bed with a grimace. His sleepy gaze finding Will before settling on the girl. Then the object in Will's hand.

"Overdosed," Hannibal states, voice husky with sleep. Slowly, Will turns around and takes a step towards the bed. Hannibal tilts his head as he looks up at him with half-drawn eyes. His expression aloof. Will stops staring to lower his gaze to the syringe in his hand.

"Before you ask," says Hannibal, "you knew as much as I did that she was a user."

Will looks up as the other reclines against the pillows with a grunt. Black gaze watching him impassively.

"But your own needs made you turn a blind eye," he continues to say as Will closes his eyes. "Are we really so different, you and I."

"I do not choose to prey on the vulnerable," says Will slowly, eyes slipping open.

Hannibal presses his cheek into the pillow. Unperturbed by the accusation of his stare.

"And you suppose the wolf, in the midst of its need to feed, refuses prey suspected to be sick or maimed," he murmurs.

"If it suspected consuming such would make it sick, yes," Will snaps impatiently with a frown, his voice loud in the relative silence of the room.

A pause as Hannibal looks him over before lifting his eyes to regard him coolly.

“Consuming against its nature is what makes it sick,” he states, and Will barely manages to hold his gaze before turning his face away with a hard swallow.

“…I’m sorry you feel that way,” he utters, eyes downcast.

“No, Will. You’re sorry you didn’t go through with it,” says Hannibal, matter-of-fact. “But regardless of your regret for my survival, the girl fell victim to her own desires.”

Will hears rustling and looks up to see Hannibal sat up on the edge of the bed, facing away. Hears the quiet heaving of a sigh.

“Now she will no longer be tormented by them,” Hannibal adds, “which is more than what can be said for some.”

Will closes his eyes at the defensive tone of his voice, turning his back on Hannibal.

“…what are we going to do with her,” he eventually asks.

“I have a drawing to finish.”

He watches the girl’s face. Eyes closed, lips parted. Euphoria frozen in her brow.

“Perhaps you would rather report her demise to the police,” says Hannibal. “At the expense of the child learning of its mother’s abandonment to chase the dragon.”

Will turns his face to the side, gaze downcast.

“Perhaps there is a better alternative,” he continues to murmur.

There is a long pause as Will feels the other waiting for his response. Finally, he takes a deep breath and exhales inwardly, eyes closing again.

“A missing persons,” he finally answers, voice quiet and hollow.

He hears the quiet approach of bare feet on tile. Senses the other stopping to stand beside him.

“I don’t suppose you wish to help me finish the drawing.”

Slowly, Will lowers himself into a sit on the edge of the bed. Leans over as he presses his head into his hands.

Not like this.

A pause, turning the air into lead. But before it crushes them entirely, Hannibal cuts through it with the sharp finality of his words. Three syllables sawing at the tether between them.

“Very well.”

Happy New Year

Slowly, Will lowers his hands from his face and lifts his head to watch Hannibal pacing towards the desk. His naked body bleached white by the cold moonlight. The dried streaks of blood tracing the inside of his thighs and down his legs still visible when he walks. Disgust drops like a rock in the pit of Will's stomach. The glowing embers of his desire suddenly turned cold.

"Did you kill her?" he asks, voice quiet and low. Carrying all the weight of self-loathing. Hannibal stops before the desk and, leaning down, opens a drawer.

"No," he answers simply, taking out his sketchbook and straightening up. His eyes on the pages which he begins to turn. "Because you said please," he adds with feigned nonchalance.

Will frowns harder but says nothing as he continues to stare at the other's unreadable countenance masking a deeper menace; the true face of Hannibal Lecter that Will has glimpsed before in the past. *Is this revenge for my failed attempt to kill us?* Hannibal must be able to sense his doubt, because he pauses in the middle of turning a page.

"I woke up when I heard her doing the same," he begins to say without interest, like an accused man who is tired of being asked the same question by the authorities. "She was looking for her purse, which she'd dropped outside the door," he continues to explain, returning his attention to his sketches. "Having retrieved her purse, she then sat down in the chair and asked if I would like to share her heroin. She told me a friend had fixed her up with something special to celebrate the new year with, and whilst it did cross my mind at the time that it would remove the intense pain in my rectum, I declined and went back to sleep."

At Will's lack of a reply, Hannibal tilts his head at the sketchbook lying open in his hands.

"I guess she did not intend to celebrate the new year in the presence of her child," he comments. "Does that alleviate some of your moral dilemma, Will?" he asks, looking up from the page to meet his stare. "That she was likely an unfit mother incapable of choosing between a narcotic high and her own blood?"

Uncomfortable he has to look up at the other, Will slowly stands up.

"You don't get to decide that," he says.

"Isn't that what you've been doing, Will? With Melissa and Richard. With Daniel," says Hannibal in return. "In my absence tonight, you could have done anything you wanted. But you chose to bring the girl back." A small pause, with a lofting of his eyebrows. Just to drive the point home. "To the wolves' den."

"I brought her back," Will begins uncomfortably to explain, breaking eye contact.

"To enjoy carnally?" says Hannibal, interrupting. "You didn't need me to do that. But it's nice you thought of me," he says flippantly.

"It wasn't my intention to kill her," says Will, eyes falling half drawn with increasing despondency even as he attempts to defend himself against the other's barrage of implication.

"And nobody has."

“You wanted to finish your drawing,” Will states, waiting for Hannibal to meet him in the eye.

“You were aware of this,” Hannibal answers simply, and Will feels the scrutiny of his black eyes dragging over his person like sandpaper. “And yet, you were hoping for what, exactly?” he continues to say, low voice laced with provocation, and Will swallows unconsciously, his chin lifting by a fraction against the oncoming attack. “To fuck me into submission with the hope that I would somehow grow too distracted to pursue what I have always done?”

“You pursued me,” Will says quietly, forcing himself not to look away despite the unexpected tremor of emotion rippling through him. “Or am I not enough, now that you’ve won?”

Hannibal lids his eyes at him. His expression hardening into a blank slate. His lips part and remain parted for a moment as he carefully collects his words for the finishing blow that Will unconsciously braces against as they stand there with the black seething gulf between them. The accusation in those hooded eyes of someone who has taken the leap only to look back to find they have done so alone.

“If this is victory,” Hannibal begins to say mildly, “why does it feel as though one is barely surviving?” Shutting the sketchbook with an audible snap, he puts it down on the desk and reaches into the open drawer. "Believe what you wish, Will," he adds, "but I didn't kill the girl." Taking out a cell, he deftly assembles the rest of it as Will watches on.

“What are you doing?” he asks.

“Asking for a favour,” replies Hannibal.

“From who?”

“Guess.”

“I don’t know.”

“You’ve had the pleasure of meeting him recently.”

“…you keep a person suit with all your wives?”

“Mohamed is not my wife,” says Hannibal. “But if he was, he would most likely murder the others in their sleep.”

He continues to stand there as he watches Hannibal press the cell to his ear, his eyes on the sketchbook sitting on the desk as he waits for a connection. Will is torn between Hannibal getting through to the other and owing the man even more, or being left alone with Hannibal’s wishes which he currently feels neither willing nor able to grant. He looks at the girl curled up in the chair. Heaves another silent breath beneath the crushing weight of his conscience and has to lower himself back down into a sit. He hears Hannibal speak in a language he doesn’t understand and looks up to find the other opening his sketchbook again as he stands before the desk, cell pressed to his ear. His tone is apologetic, as though he is sorry for disturbing the other, and Will watches him slowly turning pages again as he continues to murmur down the phone. The inflections in his voice suggestive of a certain familiarity, as that shared between old friends, as well as gratitude. His utterances continue politely before the call ends.

“Isn’t he in Dubai?” Will asks one out of the many questions on his mind as Hannibal puts the phone down on the desk.

“He is.”

“What did you ask for?”

“A body,” answers Hannibal as he starts walking towards the bathroom. Will stands up again.

“What body?”

“One of the men he killed,” he continues to say as he reaches the doorway.

“Did you tell him to kill them?” Will asks, and Hannibal stops before he disappears into the bathroom. “Because I didn’t?”

“No.”

“But you wanted the bodies.”

“I didn’t ask for anything.”

“He just knew,” says Will, unable to suppress his cynicism, and Hannibal continues to gaze into the space in front of him.

“I guess he understands my needs,” he answers, black eyes finding Will from the corners. “I believe some call it empathy.”

Lips pressing together, Will watches him slip out of sight into the bathroom.

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When Hannibal goes to the door, Will follows. There is nobody waiting outside. Unable to help himself, Will steps out the way as Hannibal pulls the black bag inside and hurries silently down the stairs, hoping to catch whoever it was who had made the delivery. Reaching the bottom, he exits the building and steps up to the closed iron gate, peering through it down the narrow and winding street. It is dark and difficult to see, now that the moon has been obscured by clouds, and he cannot remember if he had passed by any streetlights on his way up to the premises. Glancing around to check nobody is watching, he steps back inside.

They stand there, looking down at the naked body of the man curled up inside the iced bag together with the hard shapes of objects concealed inside protective bags. Will recognises his face as belonging to one of the younger members of the group who had gone after him with a broken bottle in the restroom.

“You would be the better representation of Time, of course,” says Hannibal as he stands across from Will. Wearing only his underwear as he tilts his head at the corpse. “Our time together cut short by the empath’s inability to read the truth about a girl.”

Will says nothing as he lowers his gaze back to the body.

“You understand I must follow certain procedures if you wish to spare the child’s feelings,” Hannibal explains matter-of-fact. “In order for her to become a missing person, I must render her body unidentifiable. Or at least, to the best of my abilities.”

Will looks up, then, and meets the other’s thoughtful gaze.

“What an inconvenience you are,” he adds quietly, and Will looks over to the girl, pained by the thought of her mutilation under Hannibal’s hands because of him. His lips part, but he cannot find the

words. The girl is dead. Whatever happens next won't change that fact. Growing impatient waiting for a response, Hannibal lowers into a squat before the bag, unzipping a side pocket and pulling out a sealed plastic envelope. Straightening up, he holds onto it between his hands, eyes watching contemplatively its blank grey surface.

"Happy new year, Will," he says, holding it out to him across the body. Without meeting him in the eye, he takes the envelope. Stands there looking down at it.

"You should go before it gets messy."

He watches Hannibal squatting down by the bag again to begin feeling around for, and removing the black bags packed in with the body. Seemingly focused on the task at hand, those hooded eyes don't look up again, and before he can suppress the urge, Will suddenly hurls the envelope at him. It hits Hannibal's head and lands in the bag. Chest heaving slowly, Will stands there with his hands clenching into fists at his sides. Hannibal's eyes are downcast as he watches the envelope. Then, picking it up, he holds it in the air towards Will.

"You dropped something," he says without looking at him, and, painfully aware of the sound of his own breathing in the otherwise silent room, Will realises he is powerless to the turmoil of anger and everything else shredding his composure. Shutting his eyes, he snatches the envelope with a hand and turns from the other. There are many things he could say as he walks away, but he cannot bring himself to say them. By the time he has grabbed his coat and moved to the door, put his hand on the handle, he knows he will be stepping out in silence. And as he hesitates, waiting for anything else Hannibal may wish to throw at him, be it anchor or lifeline, he realises he is about to cry – liquid heat threatening to spill from his eyes irrationally on their own accord – and is glad to be facing the door. When nothing comes, as he'd expected, he opens it and steps out.

Abigail

The smell of burnt flesh hangs in the air even after the flames have been extinguished. It makes him wonder how much time has passed since he last indulged in the meat of the ignorant. Melissa. He remembers how she had tasted surprisingly sweet, and had been looking forward to learning of his companion's views on the dish – on the night marking the other's first accomplishment, measured by whatever standards he had chosen to set himself – when he looked across the table and saw his expression. It was fine. He, more than anybody, can understand that changing a person can take time. And he is mostly a patient man. But Will's resistance to the meal was borne from that old chestnut of his. The pea beneath the mattress. And he might as well had been dining with a dog who simply refuses to put down its bone. No matter how far he tries to throw it, it just keeps coming back, and each time, the notion that he can't seem to tempt the other to trade it for something more delicious continues to taunt him with the suggestion of failure. The only time such a domesticated creature will regress to its feral state appears to be when it is faced with a worthy adversary or prey, providing it has been significantly starved. And yet, amidst all this training, he's the one who is left hungry.

"You're doing it again."

He stops staring at the wall and returns his attention to the body in the bath. Sees Abigail propped up in its place. Her mouth streaming with dark rivulets of blood. The pliers are still in his hand, pinching the last molar that has long stopped dripping. She speaks with surprising clarity for someone with no teeth.

"Yes," he answers, turning to drop the tooth into the bag along with the rest.

"Don't you want him here?" she asks, and facing her again, he picks up a clean cloth.

"Of course," he says, leaning away to turn on the tap before wetting it in the stream and bringing it to her chin. He ought to rinse her down properly with the showerhead. But the noise might chase her away and, as loathe as he is to be visited, he doesn't mind the company. He has missed her, after all.

"Then what are you afraid of?" she asks as he cleans her chin without responding. "That he'll disappoint you?"

"We all have flaws," he states, feeling her eyes on his face.

"Why can't you accept his?" she says quietly.

"Accepting his will exasperate my own," he explains patiently as he watches the cloth dragging over her skin. He hesitates before adding, "I am not myself when I am with him."

"You don't like that he's changed you?"

His glance is answer enough, and a furrow appears in her pale brow.

"But…you've changed him, too," she says.

A pause as he finishes cleaning her face and leans away to rinse the cloth. Maybe by the time the water stops running, he'll look back and she'll have gone, taking all her questions with her.

“Remember that time I baked a cake and it came out ugly?” she begins to recount an old memory instead. “You let me take a knife to it, and I cut off a piece here, then another piece there. Then another piece, and another piece.”

“Until there was no cake left,” he says, unable to help a smile as he finally looks her in the eye.

“Until there was no cake left,” she echoes him, smiling too. And as the silence settles between them, he feels the weight of regret beginning to push up through the depths like a little red buoy.

“If you cut away what makes Will, Will…”

He pushes it back under.

“Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind.”

Her expression grows sad, and he holds her gaze as the incision appears and swiftly travels the width of her throat.

“…what if you’re just being cruel?” she half whispers as her life spills out of her, bringing it all back until he wants to stand and walk away. Looking down, he picks up a new cloth. Lays it carefully over her face. Her uneven breaths pulling and pushing at the material between her parted lips. When she speaks again, she is afraid.

“How do you know he won’t stop coming after us…?”

He’s heard enough. Picking up the hammer lying on the tile, he lays a hand on the top of her head.

“Shhh…grįžkite į upelį, mano miela mergaitė," he murmurs.

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After a while, he pauses working and takes a breath. Checks the time. As he studies the girl's belongings in the plastic bag, he notices there is only one earring. He searches the room for it, but it is not there. Then, watching the contents again, his eyes fall on the clutch bag and he moves to the front door. Begins to open it silently when he suddenly stops, hand still on the handle. Will is sat on the top of the stairs. Startled by Hannibal’s appearance, he hurriedly drags a hand over his face, his eyes on the opened envelope held limply in one hand. The other sitting as a closed fist on his knee. In the silence of the early hours, Hannibal says nothing as he studies Will.

“You have one flight remaining,” he says eventually as he watches that hand. Will doesn’t respond. His eyes downcast. For a moment, he almost considers telling the other about his visitor. *What if you’re just being cruel?*

“Do you want to make yourself useful?” he eventually asks, and Will looks up. His blue eyes red and shimmering still. Turning from that stare, he goes back into the room, leaving the door ajar.

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Will hadn’t been sure if he would go back into the room. He had sat outside for a good while, holding on to the envelope even though he knew he would be catching neither of the flights. One back to Molly. One back to his other home. Their temporary base. Both just as meaningless as each other while Hannibal remains on the other side of the door. And as he waited, he noticed an earring lying on the floor. Knew Hannibal would eventually come out to look for it, and had debated getting up and letting himself back in. Using the earring as a peace offering of sorts as he steels himself against

whatever grotesque artistry awaits him within the four walls. He hadn't considered it as an invitation. Had insisted, once, that it's not his forte. Had implied, he had thought, that doing what Hannibal does is not an inherent inclination of his own, as much as he can see what the other is trying to achieve. But even as he continues to blame himself for the girl's death, to question why he acted with such recklessness, only to be analysed so scathingly by Hannibal as a result, he knows they aren't good enough reasons to send him away. Cannot even be sure if there are any remaining in this world that can.

So, he goes back in. Helps Hannibal create the Bernini sketch. A headless male torso suspended as Time, the back peeled into wings held open with wiring. The girl is Truth, reposing within the cocoon of bedding upon the bed. Her face should be gazing, perhaps in surprise, at being revealed. Instead, her head has been wrapped round with sheets, and through the red staining white, it is possible to discern a huge cavity where the face should be. Her hands, posed to mimic both surprise and a defensive attempt to protect one's modesty in the face of exposure, are charred. Beneath her foot rests the man's – boy's – severed head which Will had wrapped into a sphere. Covering the blankly staring eyes.

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After Hannibal tells him the time of the flight to Dubai, he goes into the bathroom and runs a bath. Soon, Will smells marijuana, and walks towards the open doorway. Stood at the threshold, he watches Hannibal lowering himself into a sit inside the tub. A suppressed groan slipping past his lips from which a neat white cigarette dangles. Courtesy of Mohamed, he presumes, and immediately wants to know if Hannibal had requested it, or if it was gifted him.

"You should freshen up before the flight," Hannibal murmurs, and Will stops staring at the bobbing joint to fixate instead on the bathwater. He starts to take off his clothes as the other watches, leaving them on a pile on the floor before stepping towards the bath. Climbing in, he lowers himself into a sit opposite Hannibal. Finally meets the other's eyes as they regard him from beneath the veil of half-drawn lids and the smoke exhaled into the air between them.

"I meant the shower," he says idly, head tilting as he lifts the cigarette back to his lips. Will grabs the edges of the bath, pausing when he hears Hannibal pulling noisily on the filter. Holding his breath, he narrows his eyes at Will. "Sit down," he instructs before blowing an obscuring cloud from his open mouth. Moving his hands from the edges, Will folds his arms upon his knees which he tucks up in front of him from lack of space. Hannibal's legs are pressing against his sides beneath the water. Will observes those black eyes studying the end of the cigarette before they look up to meet his. When the white stick is offered to him, he hesitates before slowly unfolding his arms to take it between his fingers.

"…what's in it?" he asks, looking down as it continues to smoke.

"Nothing too lethal," Hannibal answers casually, scooping handfuls of water onto his chest. Will looks up to see him rubbing his hands over his chest hair and neck.

"You trust him," he says, voice low and quiet.

"Until I don't."

Meeting him in the eye, Will lifts the filter to his lips and slowly draws, brow knitting as he feels the hit taking effect instantly. It is potent, whatever it is, and he supposes if it is lethal, it wouldn't be so bad to be found dead in a bath with Hannibal. At least they'd be together. Sighing louder than he had

intended, Will immediately takes another vigorous drag from the cigarette. Eyes returning to the white tendrils escaping from the end.

“Did you pursue him?” he exhales. “Back in the day.”

“Pursue him.”

“Want him,” says Will, looking up. Hannibal lofts his eyebrows impassively. Will looks down again, pulling irritably from the joint. “Sexually. To eat. Do what we do,” he blows and rattles off hurriedly.

“And what is it that we do, Will.”

It’s nice to hear him say his name.

“I’ll be damned if I know,” he mutters, and Hannibal pushes off the sloped end of the bath to sit up with a wince. His pinched expression reminding Will of how viciously he had abused the other in the night. Maybe that’s why he’s sat in a bath smoking cannabis. Take the edge off.

“Damned if you do, damned if you don’t,” murmurs Hannibal, his eyes falling on the blunt which he gestures for. “Rock and a hard place.”

When Will doesn’t pass it, Hannibal reaches for it, and he moves his hand out of the way.

“So did you?” he asks, voice low. Staring into black.

“Fuck?”

Like it’s nothing. Will feels his jaw flexing despite himself, but does not break eye contact.

“He said you despise it.”

“He’s not wrong.”

He moves his hand and is allowed to take one more hit from the cigarette before Hannibal suddenly grabs his throat, his fingers squeezing hard as he leans in. Stopping short of their mouths touching.

“He’s not right,” Hannibal adds, black slits smouldering as he stares into Will who stares back with lidded eyes. The other's hand cutting off his air supply. And when Hannibal finally lets go, he does so anticipating the smoke gushing haphazardly from Will’s mouth, and immediately takes it into himself. Inhaling through his own mouth held open and ready to receive. His dark eyes watch Will's lips. And he, in turn, is sat close enough to distinguish between individual eyelashes.

“No more drugs,” Will utters.

“New year resolution?”

“Without consent,” he adds, and Hannibal moves suddenly without warning, his teeth catching his bottom lip painfully as he surges forward, pressing Will back against the taps. He plants his hand against the other’s chest instinctively, but forgets to push when he feels the surprising softness of his mouth moving against his own. Hannibal kisses him hard, and he fights against the pressure. Stabs his tongue in before the other can. Then the sensation is gone, as quickly as it had materialised, and he catches his breath as Hannibal leans back with amusement tugging on the corner of his lips.

“Was that consent?” he murmurs lowly. “Your tongue inside my mouth.”

Dropping the cigarette in the water, Will puts his hands on Hannibal and shoves him hard. As he falls back against the slope with a grunt, Will grabs the edges of the bath. His wedding band clinking against porcelain. Hooded eyes watch up mildly as Will looms over him. Then move onto his left hand.

“You have a flight to catch,” he reminds him quietly.

“As do you,” Will replies as he leans back before beginning to climb out of the bath. Grabbing a towel, he wraps it around his hips on his way out. Pauses as he reaches the threshold. Eyes on the floor.

“I’m sorry if-”

“A cheetah doesn't apologise for its spots, Will. Nor the zebra its stripes.”

Will continues to stand there at the doorway.

“You couldn’t hurt me if you tried," says Hannibal.

Will turns his face to the side, gaze remaining downcast.

“Can’t I?”

“No.”

Gradually, he turns around, one hand still holding on to the towel. The other he brings up to run through his curls and remain clutching the side of his head as he slowly lifts his eyes. Hannibal is watching him through his lashes as he rests against the slope.

“Good,” Will utters. “Because there won’t be much left when I’m done with you.”

A tilt to his head. Followed by a smile. Small, but devastating.

“Naturally,” he murmurs, eyes giving Will a once-over. “I expect the big bad wolf to consume every last part of me.”

Despite such words, it is Will who feels he is being eaten alive by that starving stare.

“…without throwing up,” Hannibal adds with a lofting of his brows, and Will does the same out of reflex.

“Are you going to hold that against me every time?”

Hooded eyes gaze off nostalgically as the smile remains.

“I've always swallowed everything you've given me, Will. Like a good boy.”

Will snorts quietly through the nose, recalling the times he’d fed the other.

“Like a black hole,” he drawls as he regards the other sardonically.

Hannibal pushes off the bath to fold his arms upon the edge. His chin resting atop them as he looks up at Will. His bottom lip jutting ever so slightly.

“After your punishment,” he says innocently with a blink.

Will inhales through his nose unconsciously. Back straightening as he frowns flatly at the other.

“That's not what I,” he begins to utter before trailing off to the sight of Hannibal slowly biting onto his bottom lip. Taking a breath, he drags his eyes away and turns back round. Doesn’t bother retorting as he hurries out of the bathroom to join the dead – the lesser of two evils.

Welcome

Chapter Notes

The world disappears from beneath him and he jerks awake from the turbulence, eyes opening to the sight of Hannibal's sleeping face. The man's hand on his thigh. His own gripping the one resting atop the armrest between them. Letting go, he rakes his fingers through his hair while watching the interactive screen in front of him.

He glances at those flushed cheekbones. Cabin crew have been excellent at clearing the empty bottles, but he can smell the alcohol on the other's breath. Putting his hand on Hannibal's, he hesitates before moving it from his thigh. Looking down, he sees it resting dangerously close to the bulge in his trousers. Could easily put the blanket over it. Instead, he moves Hannibal's hand back onto his own lap. Unfastens his safety belt and starts to make his way to the nearest restroom.

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The door was left unlocked and sure enough, Hannibal steps inside. As Will turns from the toilet at the familiar scent of his aftershave, the floor drops abruptly from beneath their feet, and his hands shoot up to brace against the other's chest as he finds himself being pitched forward.

With a quiet grunt, Hannibal bumps against the edge of the sink, the back of his head hitting the cold surface of the mirror. Unsure of his footing in the unpredictable turbulence, Will continues to hold on to Hannibal as he closes his eyes and presses his brow against his shoulder.

After a moment, he feels an arm sliding around him and a hand cradling the back of his head. It begins to stroke his hair, transporting him back to that night when the rain had soaked through his shirt, and his heart was beating frantically inside his chest. The gun trembling in his hands.

Someone knocks tentatively on the door. As though breaking from a spell, Hannibal untangles himself from Will and opens it. The flight attendant smiles politely and is about to open her mouth when Hannibal beats her to it.
"I would like more wine, please," he announces, coherent in word choice albeit sluggish in delivery.
"Of course, sir," says the woman obligingly. "If you will just return to your seat-"
"I prefer to stand," interrupts Hannibal as he leans against the doorframe. "I'm not comfortable."
"Would you like another cushion?" she asks brightly.
"My dear," Hannibal begins to drawl, voice lowering in tone and volume as he leans towards her. "Have you ever had anal sex?"
Folding his arms behind the man, Will presses his lips together and glances up.
"I-"
"With a man hung like a horse?"
"I'm sorry," Will interrupts, stepping up and putting his hands on Hannibal's arms as he meets her stare. "He's drunk."
"He's got a big penis," says Hannibal candidly.
"He'll return to his seat," says Will to the flight attendant.
"I'll just get the wine," she says, hurrying down the aisle.
"Sit down," Will utters as he watches her go, and stiffens when a hand grabs the front of his trousers.
"Like a horse," repeats Hannibal, and Will pushes his hand away before taking him by the upper arms and steering the man down the aisle and back to their seats.

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When they arrive in Dubai, people are already waiting to meet them. The driver greets Hannibal as though he knows him, and exchanges a polite handshake with Will before showing them the way out of the airport. As they drive through the city, Will looks through the window at the multitude of cranes heralding the next wave of sky reaching towers forged in shining metal and glass. Everything looks new beneath the pink and blue watercolour of a winter sunset. And as he listens to the driver make idle conversation with Hannibal about tourism and shopping festivals, Will feels even further away from home, and the prospect of ever returning.

They remain on the one road for a long time, in the company of hundreds of other vehicles in front and behind them, hemmed in on either side by the seemingly endless row of skyscrapers. At some point, Hannibal falls asleep, and Will feels the weight of his head on his shoulder. He glances into the rear-view mirror, but the driver keeps his eyes on the road before him. Will suspects the man has sensed his reluctance to partake in casual conversation, and is grateful to be left in silence for the remainder of the journey. By the time they've joined another highway and picked up speed, leaving the metal giants of the city behind them, the skies are nearing black, and dotted liberally with stars. He remembers the last time they were sat in the back of a car together. The seductive scent of Hannibal's aftershave and blood mingling and flooding his nostrils as the heat of him seeped through the scarf to warm his hands. The ache is back instantly, pressing uncomfortably against his suit trousers. He turns his eyes on the view outside, the area here less built-up and giving way to generous stretches of green. It's hard to believe this was all once desert. Fingers slip onto his thigh, thwarting his attempt to distract himself, and he subtly moves his own hand to catch them. A glance down tells him Hannibal is still asleep, but that alone is no guarantee of safety. Grip tightening, he doesn't let go until they've reached their destination.

Mohamed's residence is lit up like a movie set with its palm trees and running fountain. Immaculate and expensive in appearance, it looks more like a monument to wealth than a place you would call home. Before the car has rolled to a stop upon the gleaming drive, the professor is marching out to greet them. Fists on his hips and beaming with self-satisfaction as he strides up to the window which the driver lowers. The night is warm here, even in their coldest month.
"Welcome, friends, to my humble abode," he says, grinning at Will before turning his attention on Hannibal who has started to stir, his hooded eyes slipping open. "Wakey wakey, sleeping beauty," Mohamed chuckles lowly. "Your prince is here."

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After Mohamed gives them a tour of his mansion, he leads them into a dining room and a servant shuts the double doors behind them. He leaves them stood at the head of the dining table, its polished surface buffed to a high shine enough to serve as a mirror to Hannibal's expression of mild admiration and Will's own default frown. A series of high-pitched beeps confirm the entry of a code, followed by another that confirms the safe has been unlocked. Humming to himself, Mohamed removes a case from the drawer and returns to set it down on the table before them. Entering a further code, he opens the lid and spins the case around. Two pistols sit in crushed black velvet.

"As requested," he says, removing one and turning it slowly in his hands. "You may take them as long as you promise not to fire a single shot in my fucking house."

"That would be unfortunate," Will utters as he puts his hand on the pistol offered him.

"As unfortunate as the idiot paying for it," Mohamed states, keeping his hold on the firearm for a moment longer before letting go with a smile.

"We shall try our best to be good guests," says Hannibal, returning the smile.

"I'll need more than that," says Mohamed, and Will resists the urge to prove to the man that neither he nor Hannibal makes promises. They barely make them to one another, let alone to others, a voice adds in the back of his mind.

"Your house will be fine," says Will, forcing a smile as he tucks the pistol away beneath his suit jacket. *You, however*.

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Lying in the spacious bed, staring up at the ornamental ceiling, Will becomes aware of a presence drawing close. Eyes swivelling towards the door, he sees her stood upon the white marble, wearing only a sheet wrapped around her head and the lapping flames on her hands. Despite the windows being closed, there is a breeze in the room that ripples the blood saturated cotton pulled over the gaping cavity where her face should be. Slowly sitting up, Will lifts his arm defensively and leans away from the growing heat as she approaches the edge of the bed, her hands held out before her. Palms facing up as they burn in the twin fires, their orange tongues reflecting off the walls. Through the crackle of the flames, the sound of weeping can be heard escaping through the bedsheet which suddenly burns away, revealing, as the ashes fall, a huge black hole. Will stares in horror as the weeping continues from the void that begins to gush forth a dark red fountain. It cascades like a waterfall onto the bed, extinguishing her hands and dropping loose teeth that misses and catches on burnt flesh. Saturating the bedding. Filling the air with the stench of blood. The weeping grows louder, until he has to shut his eyes and press his hands over his ears. But it continues inside his head. And when it suddenly stops, he opens his eyes. Sees the void right up in his face. Ready to swallow him whole.

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Hannibal hears the door joining their rooms opening and keeps his eyes closed. As the other approaches the bed, he smells the sweat and fear rolling off him, and half expects Will to grab him by the shoulder and tell him they're leaving. He's had enough. Instead, he hears the sound of fabric being peeled off skin and dropping damply on the marble floor. The scent of him intensifies as it makes itself known in the dark of the room. Hannibal continues to lie on his stomach, unmoving as he feels a shifting in the mattress on either side of him. Continues to lie still as he feels the bulk of his weight settling behind him and the cover being pulled from his body. Then he feels hands, clammy and hot, grab his arsecheeks and pull them apart. Feels the nervous puff of his breath blowing against his entrance and presses his lips together as the wet muscle of his tongue starts to lave at his ache. *Mnph*. Will licks him like he's possessed, and Hannibal finds himself fighting the urge to clench from the invasion. Holds still even as the tip tries to push in.

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Panting against Hannibal's skin, he takes himself in hand as he starts to force his tongue into the puckered opening. The slippery glide of his tongue slowly working open the tight ring of muscle choking him like a noose, aided by a finger. Neither is met with resistance. As he pushes a second finger into Hannibal and feels his passage being stretched to accommodate him, a deep twinge throbs its way through the entirety of his shaft, and he presses up on his knees.

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He feels the globes of his posterior parting beneath Will's hands. Then the blunt head of his penis, thick and wet, pushing hard against his hole. Breathing deep yet slow enough to go unnoticed, he wills himself to relax enough for the other to breach his body. The ring of muscle opening and rolling over that bulbous head as Will gasps and pushes in further. He bites his lip at the sudden pressure against his prostate. Listens to Will's shuddering breath as he climaxes - his thickening shaft pulsating hard inside his rectum.

Will soon pulls out and lies down on the mattress beside him. The cover is pulled up and Hannibal continues to lie there unmoving. Listening until the rhythm of the other's breathing has grown steady. Then, believing Will to have fallen asleep, he closes his eyes and reaches down a hand.

The Guest

“You are married?”

Will stops eyeing the chandelier to watch the young tailor pulling the measuring tape taut between his tanned hands before stepping closer to Hannibal. *Why do people keep asking them this question?* Although, waking up in the other’s room that morning, Will had experienced a somewhat surreal snapshot of what life could be like if he really was bound to Hannibal for the remainder of it.

He had opened his eyes to the sight of Hannibal watching him as he’d lain on his side beneath the cover across from Will. Head in his hand. His hair unkempt and falling across those hooded eyes.
“Good morning,” he’d greeted, and Will had been hesitant in his response.
“Hey,” he’d eventually uttered as he rolled onto his back and rubbed a hand over his face. Remembering the night before. The faceless figure.
“We should get up. The tailor will be here soon.”
Will had watched Hannibal climb out of bed to stand naked in the morning sun filtering in through the thin veil of the curtains.
“You should lock the door next time,” he’d said as he slowly sat up.
“I don’t mind,” Hannibal had replied in the middle of a stretch. “It’s like having a pussycat coming and going as he pleases.”

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The last thing he remembers is sitting down at the desk in his room. He had not long landed in the country, but was determined to get things rolling as quickly as possible. His request to meet with those in charge of security and immigration at Dubai airport was received with an air of scepticism, but they had assured him a response would be made as soon as possible. Perhaps in the region of a few hours. And so he’d loosened his tie and poured himself a drink after checking in at the nearby hotel. Now, upon deeper reflection, he believes there had been a presence in his room. One which had approached from behind and smothered him with fumes from a cloth until the glass tumbler slipped out of his failing grasp, and hit the carpeted floor with a dull thud.

Looking up from the elaborate pattern in the rug, he scans the ornate room in which he has been left. No restraints, although his wrists still ache from the chafing of plastic. A man is stood guarding the arched doorway. Facing out as he murmurs into a cell phone. His suit just a touch too tight to effectively conceal the firearm tucked into its holster nestled at his hip. He hears voices in the near distance, but does not wish to wait for them to come to him. Despite being unscathed – for the time being – he understands the act of kidnapping is likely to be followed up by further threats, and would feel infinitely better armed when negotiations are to begin. Rising slowly from the couch, he paces silently across the rug. Eyes trained on the cell phone which the man continues to speak into. Then, holding his breath, he comes right up behind the other and grabs him in a headlock whilst snatching the pistol first. Draws it. And presses it against the man’s groomed cheek.

“Who’s in charge?” he utters lowly, and one raised hand gradually folds to point him in the right direction. Using the firearm, he delivers a sharp blow to the other’s nape, which is enough to send the slighter man crumpling. Searching his pockets, he pulls out a zip tie and secures his wrists behind his back. With a grunt, he drags the man back from the doorway. Propping him against the wall, he snatches his pocket square and crams it into his mouth. Straightening up, he quickly checks the gun over before cocking it and taking a cautious step towards the sound of conversation.

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“And you, sir?”
Will snaps out of his thoughts and knits his brow at the tailor whose eyes are on the tape as he measures the length of Hannibal’s arm.
“Are you married?” the young man continues to ask.
“Yes,” he finally answers, frowning as his fingers move to the empty space where his wedding band should be. *When did I take it off?*
“Must be a very beautiful woman to have caught you in her snare, sir.”
He glances up at Hannibal standing before the floor length mirror. Back straight, chin up as he studies his own reflection.
“Very,” he utters, and sees that dark gaze meeting his in the glass.
“Will?”
At the unexpected sound of his voice, all three men look towards the door. Jack Crawford is stood at the threshold, pistol drawn before him. His surprised expression a mirroring of Will’s as both men stare at one another speechlessly.
“Jack,” says Hannibal quietly, breaking the spell with his accented voice. “It’s good to see you.”
“You,” Jack grits lowly through his teeth. As he trains the gun on Hannibal, something makes him jerk involuntarily – his breath catching in his throat. His face frozen with a startled expression as he holds still. Inhaling sharply, Will stands up as though released from his trance. Jack takes a breath and begins to stumble forward.
“Jack,” Will half gasps, running over to catch him as he falls. The shaft of an arrow protrudes from his back. Shot with enough force for a portion of the shaft itself to be lodged inside Jack’s body. Will lifts his head and stares down the hallway. Mohamed is stood at the end, bow in hand.
“Thought you might want to say goodbye,” he hollers merrily with his hands held out to the sides.
“Will,” Jack rasps, and he turns his attention back to the man in his arms. To the other’s knitted brow and look of remorse. Eyes heavy lidded. “I know you left to be with him.” Will glances up at Hannibal who watches on calmly from a distance. He hears the approach of Mohamed’s footsteps, accompanied by others. Feels Jack taking a breath before continuing. “I’m sorry I failed us, Will,” he murmurs, hand moving to grip Will’s arm. “I can’t bring you back. That’s up to you now,” he struggles to add with a grunt of pain. Hand moving up to dig into the front of Will’s shirt. As he leans his head down, Jack whispers breathlessly, “Don’t forget who you are.” Brown eyes snap shut with a quiet groan, and Will blinks back the water suddenly hindering his vision.
“Jack-”
“Remember,” he utters, the syllables barely slipping past his lips before he falls still in Will’s arms. Staring at Jack’s frown, Will is unable to stop the wavering as it trembles over and escapes down his face. *I’m sorry. I didn’t know*.
“Well,” exclaims Mohamed as he steps into the room. “How cathartic.”
Slowly, Will lifts his eyes to meet the other’s grin.
“Now, back to more important business,” he states, tossing his bow to a wingman stood at his side as a couple more draw towards Will and Jack. Letting go reluctantly, he stands and watches them handle Jack like a piece of unwanted furniture. His blood still dripping onto the white marble floor.
Mohamed tuts and snaps at his men irritably in Arabic. They begin to hurriedly carry him out of the room.
“Where are you taking him?” Will demands to know as he steps towards the professor.
“Why?” says Mohamed, lofting his heavy brows with feigned nonchalance. “Do you intend to follow? Bit late for that now, don’t you think?”
Jaw flexing, Will holds the other’s gaze for a moment longer before stepping past him out of the room.
“Have you chosen the colour of your suit?” Mohamed calls after him, and when Will doesn’t answer, asks again, “has he chosen?” To which the tailor can be heard piping up, and the professor commenting after, “blue, so the man can cry all he likes and nobody would know.”

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“And what about you, my friend?” Mohamed asks.
“The gentleman has opted for a light grey three piece, sir,” answers the tailor for Hannibal, and Mohamed makes a noise of approval as he crosses the marble floor.
“That will be all,” he states, and with a polite nod, the young man gathers his things and takes his leave. Hannibal remains stood with his hands in his trouser pockets before the colossal mirror spanning half the length of the side wall and extending, in its reflection, the sumptuous rows of majlis upholstery marking the perimeter of the already spacious room. In the mirror, he watches Mohamed plonk himself down on the section of sofa nearest to him, his arms spreading out on either side atop the backrest as he crosses his legs and tilts his head.
“That was rather dramatic,” he says, and Mohamed smiles to himself.
“You know me, my friend. All about the theatrics.”
Hannibal turns around and there is a pause as they watch the blood on the floor.
“An informant told me he had requested to speak to those in charge of security and immigration,” Mohamed begins to explain, foot tapping a steady rhythm in the air. “So while he waited, I stole him from the hotel he was staying at. Brought him here.” His hand slips into his suit jacket. Removes a notebook which he holds out to Hannibal.
“Seems you had some assistance with security closer to home,” he comments with a lofting of his brows as Hannibal takes the book.
“Chiyoh,” he says as way of explaining before opening the small volume and flicking through Jack’s scrawl.
“Ah, yes,” Mohamed chuckles. “The mysterious Chiyoh. Why couldn’t she have been your plus one?”
“Would you have had as much fun?” Hannibal asks mildly, eyes on the notebook. Recognises Melina’s name. He could have killed her before they left. But he knew Will liked the girl.
“Are you unhappy with the way I have managed my affairs?” Mohamed asks in return, voice quiet and low.
“Your affairs,” Hannibal echoes, pausing his perusing to meet the other’s dark gaze.
“You are my friend, so I consider you a part of my affairs,” explains Mohamed with a shrug.
“Together with your great entourage of American bullshit which I allow into my house.” Ignoring the other’s offensive use of language, Hannibal regards the Egyptian’s haughty profile.
“I am grateful to your concern for our welfare-”
“Your welfare,” Mohamed interrupts to correct him.
“And I remain indebted to your generosity,” he continues to say, leaning down to take Mohamed’s ringed hand and press his lips to the back of it.
“And I yours,” the younger man murmurs, taking back his hand as Hannibal straightens up and looks towards the doorway.
“The man I want you to meet.”
Hannibal returns his attention to those playful eyes.
“He’s waiting in the kitchen,” Mohamed adds with a devilish grin.

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Stepping out of the shower, Will stands at the sink and stares into the fogged mirror. He’d tried to follow Mohamed’s men, but only got so far before he ended up in a scrap. They were reluctant to engage in fisticuffs with a guest, but Will needed an outlet, especially when he knew they wouldn’t let him near Jack’s body. He had underestimated the extent of Mohamed’s influence, and was paying for it now in blood, albeit not his own. Planting his hands on cold marble, he bows his head over the sink and closes his eyes. If only he’d known sooner. *Then what…?* He doesn’t know the answer to the voice in his head, only wishes he wasn’t feeling the guilt weighing like an albatross around his neck. He wanted Mohamed’s men to hit him harder because he deserves it. Maybe get himself hospitalised

and arrested, anywhere away from here just now. And Hannibal can visit him in disguise when he's not busy attending weddings or travelling around the world. Leaving a trail of death wherever he goes. Or had it been Will all along who had been witlessly drawing people into their orbit before casting them into oblivion? In which case, he needs to bury both Hannibal and himself in the desert.

When he comes out of the bathroom, he sees Mohamed lying on the bed. Arms folded behind his head. Ankles crossed at the heels. Immediately, he lunges back inside to snatch the pistol from the shelf before stepping out and training it on the other man.
"Peace, brother," says Mohamed, holding up his hands. "I'm just here to talk."
"So talk."
"Alright."
Refolding his arms behind his head, Mohamed exhales.
"I understand that man probably meant a lot to you," he begins to say patronisingly.
"You know nothing," Will interrupts, and Mohamed looks off to the side, unperturbed by the gun still pointing at him.
"Actually, I know a lot of things," he corrects Will. "Like how a dog in pain should be put down. You're a dog lover, right? How can you not agree with me here?"
Will cocks the gun.
"You know it would be considered dishonourable to shoot your host with a firearm provided you by said host."
"Some would consider it despicable to shoot a man in the back."
"I don't entirely disagree with you there," says Mohamed, nodding slowly as he continues to study the ceiling with a thoughtful expression. "However, I was merely watching out for a friend. Who also happens to be your friend."
Dark eyes meet his.
"Feelings aside, Mr Graham. It would appear I have done the both of you a favour." Will watches Mohamed climb off the bed and stand there smoothing down the front of his waistcoat.
"Where is Hannibal?" he asks.
"With a new acquaintance," Mohamed answers, lifting his eyes to regard Will coolly. "His name is Mr Hussain." Hands slipping into his trouser pockets, he stands across from Will. Leans in to imitate intimacy, his chest stopping short of touching the end of the barrel. "He's our closet Muslim cannibal," he whispers loudly before straightening up and lofting his brows at Will. Then he turns and walks towards the door. Puts his hand on the handle and opens it. Begins to step out before pausing to turn his face to the side. His eyes narrowing and lips parting as though he has just remembered something.
"You asked where I was taking him," he says, dark eyes finding Will's from the corners before a smirk tugs at his lips and he slips out of sight.

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Opening the door to his room, he sees Will sat on the edge of the bed. An almost empty glass tumbler held loosely between his hands as blue eyes gaze listlessly at the wall in front of him. His shirt is half-buttoned, as though he had lost interest in dressing himself.
"I was just looking for you," he says quietly, closing the door behind him and walking towards the bed. "Dinner will be ready soon."
"I'm not hungry," Will replies, and as he nears, he sees fresh cuts on his face. Sitting down beside him, Hannibal studies the injuries more closely.
"What happened to your face?" he asks, hand moving instinctively towards a particularly nasty gash on his cheek, but Will puts his own hand up to fend him off.
"What do you expect when you walk into a lion's den," he murmurs, lowering his hand back down to resume its clasp on the tumbler. Hannibal watches down at the glass.
"You went after him," he says, lidded eyes lifting to watch Will's profile.

“Yeah,” Will utters, gaze lowering to the floor. “Not that it matters now.”
Without any useful comments to make, Hannibal sits in silence, watching nothing in particular. After a while, he feels eyes boring into the side of his face, and turns his head to see Will staring at him. A slight furrow in his brow, as always, but a new kind of doubt in his eyes. Or at least, the kind that he hadn’t seen in a good while.
“Do you still think about eating me?” Will asks hesitantly, and Hannibal can tell he is trying hard not to look away. He studies that anxious countenance for a moment longer before responding.
“Why do you ask?”
Blue eyes continue to stare at him, as though trying to impart understanding without words. When he says nothing else, however, Hannibal moves off the bed and, hitching up his trousers, lowers himself to kneel before Will. Lifting his hands, he takes the open edges of the shirt before him and begins to fasten it up.
“I didn’t think I needed to anymore,” he answers, head tilting as he observes his own hands making quick work of the remaining buttons. He leaves the neck open, give the man some breathing space, and gently brushes down the wings of his collar. Standing up slowly, he watches down at Will whose gaze remains on the floor.
“Come,” he says quietly.
“I’m not hungry.”
“At least allow yourself some food for thought if you wish to take on the lion,” he says, clasping Will’s shoulder which flinches before his hand is pushed away.
“I said,” he begins to say lowly, dangerously, blue glaring up at him from beneath that troubled brow. “I’m not hungry.”
He holds that gaze for a moment, feeling the depth of its burn, before turning to walk towards the door. Upon reaching it, he hesitates with his hand on the handle. Cannot think of what else to say, so takes his leave in silence. Shutting the door behind him.

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Not long after, there is a knock on the door. Heaving a sigh, Will slowly stands and retrieves the gun from beneath his pillow before walking towards the sound. Opening the door, he is greeted by one of Mohamed’s men holding a silver tray laden with silver dishware.
“Your dinner, sir,” he states, and stands there waiting for Will to step back so he may come in. Eyes falling on his own distorted reflection in the dome cover, he tucks the pistol into his belt and puts his hands on the tray.
“I’ve got it,” he states, and the other inclines his head politely as he lets go and takes his leave. Will watches him travel the length of the corridor until he disappears from sight. Then he steps back inside and closes the door.

Putting the tray on the desk, he stands there staring down at the dome. Slowly moves his hand onto the handle. As he deliberates, a wave of nausea begins to build in the pit of his stomach, and he steps back as it twists its way up towards his throat. Sitting down heavily on the end of the bed, he shuts his eyes and takes his head into his hands, swallowing down the urge to retch as he imagines Hannibal and another man dividing up Jack’s body between them. The high-pitched whirr of a spinning saw. The crack of bone. And the host himself, strolling into the stainless steel kitchen to clasp their shoulders and peer down curiously at their handiwork with a self-satisfied smirk. Leaving the tray untouched, he locks all the doors and lies down on the bed with the gun beneath his head. Falling asleep, he dreams of Mohamed straddling Hannibal in a dining chair. Laughing as he feeds him chunks of raw flesh from the table. Jack’s eyes wide and staring.

He doesn’t hear the knocking at first. Mistakes it for the sound of chair legs grating against the floor as Mohamed’s laughter grows breathy and ragged. Then the sound of his back hitting the surface of the table as the silverware begins to rock.

“Will.”
Opening his eyes at the sound of Hannibal’s voice, he lies there listening for signs he is not still dreaming.
“Are you awake?”
Pushing up from the bed, he looks in the direction of his voice. Slips his hand beneath the pillow before climbing off and walking towards the shared door. Stood beside it, he pauses for a moment before unlocking it and pulling it open. Hannibal’s face appears in the crack.
“I hope I’m not disturbing you,” he says, voice quiet.
“What is it?” Will mutters, and black eyes glance askance.
“May I come in?” he asks. Tentative. As though wary of the door shutting in his face. Will waits for Hannibal to meet him in the eye again before stepping back and walking towards the desk. Putting the gun down beside the tray, he sits back down on the edge of the bed.
“Were you expecting someone else?”
Glancing up, Will sees Hannibal studying the pistol as he stands there with his hands in his pockets.
“You never know.”
“He doesn’t intend on killing you,” says Hannibal, eyes on the tray. Will scoffs quietly and looks off to the side.
“How generous of him.”
“Regardless, I can see our being here is making you uneasy…”
“When am I not uneasy.”
A pause as Hannibal continues to fixate on the silverware.
“Do you wish to have sexual intercourse?”
Will frowns at the unexpected question.
“What?”
“It’s considered an effective remedy for grief.”
Jack would be turning on his cold, hard slab just now if he’d heard. If it is a slab, and not expensive marble. And if he’s still in one piece.
“I just…want to be alone.”
He feels eyes on him, but keeps his own downcast. Hannibal stands there for a long time, as though deliberating. Finally, he starts to walk back towards the door, and suddenly Will doesn’t want him to go.
“He wasn’t his to take,” he speaks up, and sees the other stopping in his peripheral vision. “It was always either you or me,” he continues to say quietly. “Nobody else.”
There is a pause as Hannibal takes in what Will has just said.
“At least this way you can be spared the blood on your hands,” he eventually says.
Will feels his brow knitting.
“And yours…” he utters, turning his face towards the other. “Did you know he was here?”
“No.”
Will continues to stare at that countenance giving nothing away.
“I was equally as surprised to see him,” Hannibal adds, and Will can’t be sure of his sincerity as he recalls him standing there, watching him and Jack from the same distance as the tailor. Hates that he can’t be sure.
“Didn’t you want to kill him yourself?” he asks quietly. *Aren’t you annoyed at Mohamed too?*
A pensive look surfaces on Hannibal’s face and he comes back to sit on the bed next to Will.
“I like that he pursued us,” he begins to say thoughtfully. “Pursued you.”
Will continues to watch his profile.
“He made me feel grateful. Kept me alive with thoughts of you changing your mind.” Drawn to the regret in his voice, to the suggestion of vulnerability, Will wants Hannibal to look at him. But like a shy creature of the night, it scarpers back into the dark before Will can find where it came from.
“Police in Kalambaka have received a missing persons report from the Holy Monastery of Saint Stephen,” Hannibal suddenly explains. “I assume it has something to do with our mysterious friends.”

“The brothers.”
“Yes.”
A pause.
“And I suspect there is information to be gleaned from our stay here,” Hannibal continues to say. “If you will bear with me.”
He looks at Will, and Will looks back.
“What information?”
“Mr Hussain is-”
“I know what he is,” Will snaps, perhaps a touch too defensively. Hannibal pauses before continuing.
“…has commented on the absence of certain individuals from a highly esteemed underground establishment-”
“What establishment?” Will interrupts.
“It makes no difference.”
“What establishment.”
A brief pause before black eyes look away.
“Culinary.”
A short and bitter laugh escapes Will’s throat before he can stop it.
“You sure you’re not going to eat me?” he scoffs, standing up and folding his arms. “Keep my brains while shipping the rest of me off to some Michelin star restaurant?” The last three words spoken with unbridled contempt. “Is that where Jack is?” Will continues to say, glaring down at Hannibal. “Or did you and Mr Hussain squabble over what seasoning to-”
He stops himself, hand clasping the lower half of his face as he shuts his eyes and takes a breath. There is a long pause as neither of them say anything. Then Hannibal stands and walks towards the door. Will doesn’t want him to go, but doesn’t trust himself, neither.
“I know there are aspects of my character which cannot win your approval.”
Looking over, he sees Hannibal stood with his hand on the handle. Watching the surface of the door.
“For as long as I can remember, I have acted on mine alone,” he continues to say. “It mattered nothing to me what anybody thought.” He pauses as he continues to stare ahead instead of meet Will in the eye. “I should like to think you know me better,” he adds before opening the door and stepping out. His name is on the tip of his tongue, but the door shuts before he can speak it.

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Later, when Will opens the shared door, he does so to an empty room. Venturing out into the rest of the mansion, he follows the sound of voices and wisps of tobacco smoke until it leads him to the open doorway of a room made for entertaining. The centre has been lowered to form a seating area reachable by a flight of marble steps. The marble ledges topped with thickly padded upholstery marking out a cosy and intimate square designed for collective lounging and relaxed conversation. Currently there is only one guest occupying a corner of the majlis, his hooded eyes gazing into the dark contents of his wineglass as his host sucks on the mouthpiece of a hookah beside him. The air is hazy with tobacco smoke. Leaning back, Mohamed exhales a snaking white plume as he offers Hannibal the mouthpiece.
“Try it,” he says. “You’ll be hooked. Get it?” Chuckling to himself, he senses Will’s presence and looks over.
“Ah, Mr Graham,” he says languidly, gesturing to the inner square. “Join us.”

Will claims the corner on the other side of Mohamed. Only so he can appear engaged while staring at Hannibal past the other man. Eventually, he’ll look at him. At least, that’s what he keeps telling himself as he continues refilling his glass. As does their host. And the more Mohamed becomes intoxicated, the more he is inclined to explain to Will the hand he has played in their travels – or rather, as Mohamed prefers to call it, their honeymoon.
“Did you never stop to wonder how you managed to hop so easily from country to country?” he

would drawl after blowing smoke forcefully from his nose. Mostly, it was just Mohamed talking and them listening. Will beginning to fixate on the length of the pipe attached to the hookah and imagining it wrapped round and digging into the other's throat. He stops listening and plays the waiting game instead. Endures a good few hours of tobacco smoke and increasingly slurred speech before he is rewarded by the sight of the professor having nodded off with the mouthpiece still clutched in his hand. Except it's not really a reward, seeing the other man's head in Hannibal's lap. Because somehow, he had slipped closer and closer to Hannibal while Will remained in his corner, waiting patiently. With his eyes closed and lips parted to his steady breaths, Mohamed looks decidedly youthful despite his heavy facial hair. His thick black curls are what most would consider to be touchable. What Will would consider easy to grab and push below a waterline. Lifting his gaze, he sees Hannibal studying the younger man's face with a similar look, and when their eyes finally meet, he knows the other is thinking the same. Except his idea of using the hookah pipe is met with the closing of hooded eyes. *No? Okay. Something else*. When they open again to stare at Will, he glances suggestively at the hookah itself. It's made of silver. Has some weight to it. Brows lofting, he looks back at Hannibal who doesn't meet his gaze, but is smiling nevertheless.

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Mohamed's men take him up to his room. Will takes the leftover drink with him back to his. A bottle in each hand. Hannibal in tow. Once the door is closed, Will presses one of the bottles into Hannibal's hands and stands there drinking from the mouth of the remaining. Comes up for air and licks his lips, watching Hannibal watching him.
"So," he slurs, free hand resting on his hip decisively. "How we doing it."
"Doing it," Hannibal echoes, lifting the bottle to his lips.
"We have to keep a low profile," he continues to say as those lidded eyes stare at his shirt. *Maybe it's come undone*. "Make it look like anyone could have done it." *Maybe he wants to help me out of it*.
"We could sneak into his room and smother him with his own pillow." He takes a swig from the bottle, swallows hard before speaking. "Strangle him in his sleep. They'd never know."
"Will…"
"I'd do it."
"We're not murdering Mohamed."
"Why not?" he growls, the fire suppressed from earlier returning tenfold. "I didn't just inhale a shit tonne of tobacco smoke for the sake of it. He's out for the count. He wouldn't see us coming. It would be easy."
"What use would he be to us dead?"
Will scoffs unpleasantly.
"You want him that much, I'll let you fuck his dead body when I'm done. Happy?"
Hannibal is quiet. Will feels uncomfortable. Like he's revealed too much.
"You're drunk."
"Yeah."
Plonking down on the bed, Will suddenly can't bear the other watching him.
"I want to be alone," he says to the floor, and drinks from the bottle again. Hannibal starts moving towards the door. Will waits for the pause. The hesitation.
"You know where I am if you need-"
"I don't," Will interrupts him, falling onto his back on the bed. Pressing the mouth of the bottle to his lips, he knocks it back until he knows Hannibal is no longer standing in the room. Then drinks some more. *You don't need me. I don't need you*. His vision blurs again, making him curse and clasp a hand over his eyes. *Goddamnit*.

Prašau

Chapter Notes

> Chapter intended to be read to the song 'Sebi' by Zala Kralj & Gašper Šantl. A version with English lyrics can be found: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3w1xUNarK6Q

Stood before the floor length windows, Hannibal gazes out upon the manmade landscape. The carefully laid grass stretching out into the desert and looking almost alien beneath the bright light of the moon. Such a contrast to the natural phenomenon of Meteora and its rock formations. He thinks of the photograph he'd found wedged between the pages in Jack's notebook. Taken by one of the brothers when they had stood together on the viewing platform of the Holy Trinity watching the snow dusted village of Kalambaka below. It captures his own profile in the foreground, wearing a thoughtful expression as his eyes look towards the mountains. Just behind him, stands Will. His dark curls teased by the wind. His eyes watching Hannibal from the corners.

Fixating upon the horizon and the faint outline of glinting architecture in the distance, he lifts the bottle. Barely feels the mouth touching his lips when he hears the door between their rooms opening. He listens to the sound of bare feet dragging across the floor as he drinks. Continues staring ahead as they stop beside him. Swallowing a mouthful of wine, Hannibal lowers the bottle and watches the night without acknowledging the other's presence. Standing there, he continues listening to the music playing through the earbuds he'd picked up at the airport, and drinks from the lightening bottle. The song ends and there is a pause before the next begins. During this wait, he feels something touch his left ear before the wireless bud is pulled free, and observes from the corners of his eyes as fingers fumble to put it in. Those blue eyes struggling beneath the heavy weight of his lashes as they look out through the glass. That frown on his face. Eventually, Hannibal reaches over and plucks the tiny device from between his clumsy fingertips. Pushes it into his ear. The song begins to play.

When your mind is full of thoughts
You can listen to the sound of my heartbeat
When your burden is heavy
You can take refuge in me

He lowers his hand. They stand there in front of the window, listening as they stare into the desert. As he begins to raise the bottle, he sees Will lifting his right hand in his peripheral vision, and holds it out to him. Will takes it and drinks deeply from the bottle. When he finally lowers it at his side, Hannibal moves his hand to take it, but the other does not relinquish his hold. He feels the brush of fingertips on the back of his hand. Holds still as they curl around his wrist to press against the scar. He lets go of the bottle and it slips slowly from his hand, but neither of them seem to notice it cracking open on the marble between them.

Ask me what keeps me going
Achievement and distances
When a leaf goes with the wind and resists it
I go with the flow and resist it

He lets Will hold his wrist until it becomes clear he won't be making the next move, and steps back from the window. Grabbing the front of the other's shirt with his right hand, he pulls Will to face him before shoving him back against the glass. Grip remaining on Hannibal's wrist, Will's eyes are downcast. He doesn't look up as Hannibal moves his hand up to begin unfastening his shirt. Lowering his own eyes to the buttons, Hannibal absently acknowledges the alcohol flowing through his veins as he struggles to make quick work of opening the garment one-handed. When he finally reaches the bottom of the shirt, he lifts his eyes to see Will looking askance. Hand resting against his chest, he avoids that drunken stare as he brings his face round the other side of Will's head and touches his cheek faintly with his lips. Exhaling softly against the scar. He sees the undulation in Will's throat as he slowly traces the line of his jaw with his lips. Starts to lower himself down the length of Will's body as his mouth travels the underside of his jaw, his neck, his chest. His right hand pulling the bud from his ear and dropping it like a forgotten grain of sand before snatching the other's belt. On his knees, Hannibal stops to breathe against the old smile. Strokes its length with his lips, and hears Will exhaling uncomfortably above. Slowly, he begins to kiss the tender skin until fingers weave themselves into his hair. Tightening spasmodically on his tresses as he sucks the sensitive tissue between the sharp edges of his teeth. Will gasps for him to stop, but he can smell his arousal, and bites down hard. A shaky cry of pain erupts into the air – sweet music to his ears – and he lets go only to catch another length of the scar with his teeth. Biting down cruelly until Will is arching against the window and grabbing his head with both his hands. Stop, he says again, voice loud and low. Desperate as he tries to push Hannibal off.

The stars are not always visible
Stay true to yourself
Don't tell me you're sorry

Will manages to dislodge him with a violent shove, and Hannibal moves his hand out to brace against the floor as he feels himself losing balance. Doesn't notice the skin of his palm splitting open upon the edge of a glass shard lying close as he stalks Will's fleeing figure with his eyes and lunges suddenly like an animal. Will grunts as he's tackled onto the ground, the breath knocked momentarily out of him. Pushing up on his knees, Hannibal climbs up the length of him and rolls Will onto his back before grabbing his belt. Chest beginning to heave, Will frowns up at him as he snatches at his hands with his own in the attempt to stop him. Bowing his head, Hannibal buries his face into Will's neck and distracts him with sucking lips and gnashing teeth as he knocks his scrabbling hands aside and jerks his belt open. Tugs down the zipper. Grabs the hard throb of his pulse and clenches his fingers around it crushingly as he frees it from the confines of his underwear, wrenching another cry of protest from Will's lips. His own pulse beating in tandem through the open wound in his palm, although Will does not appear to notice the blood smearing his skin. He hears the other begin to pant as though afraid when he puts his mouth on him, tasting the metallic tang of himself. Hears the same panicky half utterances as that night Will had watched up at Hannibal from the floor. Shaking his head no, even though his heart had whispered yes. At the memory of the other's bittersweet betrayal, Hannibal sucks mercilessly at his ache. The thought of his own reckoning making the saliva well in his jaws and escape past the corners of his mouth as he imagines the delicious sounds to spill from Will's lips should he savage him to the quick.

Looking up, he meets heavy lidded blue as he swallows him down to the root. Sees his eyes snapping shut as those lips remain agape to his shallow breaths. It's too much for him, and Hannibal is ready to receive the load of his release when Will pulls him off by the hair, severing strings of saliva from gaping lips and spit slickened flesh. Using the same hard grip, Will sits up as he pulls him up his body before grabbing the front of his shirt and tearing it open. Hannibal lets Will drag the damaged garment off his arms before the other grabs and rolls him over onto his back. His eyes staring down at him with the glazed heat of intoxicated bravado as he fumbles with Hannibal's belt. To compensate for Will's compromised dexterity, Hannibal pushes his hands aside to free himself before those hands

return to grab and drag both his trousers and underwear down his legs. Clothes abandoned to the side like shed skin, he lies there naked on the floor. Propped up on his elbows as his chest heaves slowly to mirror the other's own, and for a moment, Will just looks. Cock hard and a-twitch at the exposed and vulnerable sight of him. When he finally lunges, Hannibal tucks up his legs and grabs Will with a bloody hand to guide him hurriedly into himself. As the pain lances through him once more, forcing him open until he tears anew, he closes his eyes and arches gaspingly against the cold marble beneath Will's thrusting body. Pants breathlessly as he feels himself splitting open to let Will in.

He feels the clasp of hands on the tops of his thighs, and slips open his eyes to the sight of Will looming over him as he pulls him flush against his pummelling hips. Staring darkly at him through his lashes as he pants, open-mouthed and urgent. The heat of his gaze makes Hannibal swallow convulsively, and, half riding, half drowning in the waves of pleasured pain battering his senses, he cannot be sure whether he is staring into the flames of reckoning or recognition. And the more that stare burns into him, setting him alight from the inside out, the more Hannibal feels ready to roll over and press his brow to the cold grounding stone.

There are tears in your eyes
Let them fall
When our wishes differ
You accept me and I accept you

A furrow appears in Will's brow and Hannibal keeps his hands braced against the floor as the other presses probing digits to the skin beneath his eye. He watches them pull back towards the confused expression on Will's face, blue eyes studying the wet tips of his fingers like evidence that does not fit.

Look at me
It's not necessary that everything has a meaning

Snatching Will's wrist, he parts his lips and sucks his fingers clean, removing the anomaly. Grabbing his own legs behind the knees, he pins them back against his chest that continues to heave, panting in Lithuanian for the other to fuck him harder. Faster.

Eternity and this planet are not friends
I am but a snowflake that waits for spring to come

Instead, Will slows as he leans down to press his body against Hannibal's. Pinning him close until Hannibal can feel himself suffocating from the restraint. His hands bunching the shirt at his back. Please, he tries instead, his voice a low and breathless plea, and yet no amount of nails digging into skin, of curls being pulled or the tightening clutch of his body is enough to stop the alien gentleness with which Will proceeds to take him. His brow pressing into Hannibal's as he rocks steadily against him. Their breaths mingling between their gaping lips. Unable to look away from that seething stare, he closes his eyes. Holds on to him.

You don't need to prove yourself
The same tears and the same fear binds us

And lets go.

Suits

Chapter Notes

> Chapter intended to be read to Bad Liar by Imagine Dragons. A lyric only version of the song can be found: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTELLMhKDIE

He opens his eyes to the ornate ceiling of the bedroom. The hard marble floor having warmed beneath his skin, and the body lying atop him continuing to stave off the goosebumps. Everything is drowning in the chilly white of the moon, and for a moment he doesn't know where he is. Lifting his hand from where it rests on the other's back, he holds it up into the light. Studies with slow blinking eyes, the deep gash across the palm before his gaze falls to the shards of broken wine bottle lying nearby. The steady puff of his breath continues to blow against his neck, and he lowers his hand to the floor.

Something shifts inside him as he recalls what had happened. Something akin to the muscular coils of a snake as it alternates between tightening to crush its prey and releasing when doing so only causes itself more harm. The generic serpent wrapped around a dagger stabbed at needlepoint into the skins of thousands, and yet this crude design is the only thing he can think of just now to describe the unsettling sensation beneath his ribs. It takes precedence over the headache threatening to cleave open his skull and the throbbing ache of his cloven anus. Pulling himself together, he pushes off the floor and drags the other with him as he moves towards the door joining their rooms.

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Oh, hush, my dear, it's been a difficult year
And terrors don't prey on innocent victims
Trust me, darlin', trust me darlin'

Will sits on the edge of the bed, staring down at his hands. *He could do it now. Grab the hair at the top of his head and drag the stained blade of his knife through his throat. Let go and leave him lying there over Daniel's body*. Fingers curling into his palms, he closes his eyes and hangs his head. Sees that black gaze branded onto his retinas. Pitching his vengeful serenity against Will's own raw and indignant rage at being led by the nose like a dog. One that, having made the mistake of biting its owner, must spend the rest of its life understanding what it had done wrong.

Do you still wish to emulate the moment I took Abigail away from you?

After the fall, he had indulged in the false sense of security in their time together. Despite the uncertainty, his sense of self had grown increasingly inseparable from the other. To the point where, even when he felt he was being toyed with again, he could never quite walk away. Those daily stabs Bedelia had spoken of were keenly felt. But as to the nourishment, he couldn't be sure. Not when his well-being was so often in a questionable state.

It's been a loveless year
I'm a man of three fears
Integrity, faith and crocodile tears
Trust me, darlin', trust me, darlin'

“Hey,” says a voice in his ear, soft and familiar, pulling him back into the quiet of their bedroom and the grounding weight of her arms. Lifting his head, he turns his cheek in her direction and forces a smile. His hand reaching up to close appreciatively over her wrist as she rests her chin on his shoulder. Gives him time to settle in her embrace before asking if he wants to go on a walk with her and Walter.

So look me in the eyes, tell me what you see
Perfect paradise, tearing at the seams
I wish I could escape, I don't want to fake it
Wish I could erase it, make your heart believe

Since he came back, she had not asked for anything. As though she always knew he would come home eventually, to seek refuge in her house, in that space of her heart that she always reserved for something so lost and troubled. Maybe that was what drew him to her. The way she also took in strays without questioning. Living with the faith that, under her care, they would thrive and be happy. And he should have been. And looked as though he could’ve been, sat at the table in their kitchen, her hand on his shoulder as Jack watched them from across their mugs. Photos looking so out of place on the wooden surface, and Will had to stop himself from reaching out to touch the ones he knew were meant for him. Instead of an artfully constructed murder scene, he regarded the snapshot like it was evidence of infidelity. Saw himself marching into Hannibal’s old consulting room and tossing the images across his desk like a jealous lover. And when he realised Hannibal had in fact involved himself sexually with the victims just to spike his jealousy, he couldn’t do the wise thing and ignore it. Couldn’t not run after his scent, even if he knew he’d only be throwing himself back into the mire which Molly had so patiently scrubbed him of. But the rot is deep, and she cannot reach it. And neither could Jack.

But I'm a bad liar, bad liar
Now you know, now you know
That I'm a bad liar, bad liar
Now you know, you're free to go

The memory of Jack stood across him in the kitchen begins to falter as the present tugs at his eyelids. *They’ll remain under watch*, Jack promises. *They’ll be fine*. Those brown eyes continue to frown fixedly at him in the face of time slipping through their fingers. Believing with a stubborn, unfaltering vehemence that they still share an understanding between them. And Will had not been prepared for the remorse that swept over him as Jack’s death became imminent fact then and there on the floor of some unknown premise in an unfamiliar country. Even with his last breath did the man urge him to remember who he was, and whilst he understood and accepted the disappointment in his eyes, Will could not help but be affected by the loss of such faith, and consequently mourned Jack’s passing with more grief than he had expected.

Did all my dreams never mean one thing?
Does happiness lie in a diamond ring?
Oh, I've been asking for
Oh, I've been asking for problems, problems, problems

As the faces of Molly and Jack begin to fade, Will opens his eyes to the ceiling. His head is pounding hard enough to make the edges of his vision pulsate, and his eyes feel full of grit. Remembering the smell of shisha and the taste of wine, he realises his throat is as dry as the sun-scorched land stretching out for miles in every direction.

Sitting up, he finds himself wearing his tee and boxer shorts without remembering getting changed. As he starts to climb out of bed, his head throbs painfully and he sits back down on the edge.

I wage my war on the world inside
I take my gun to the enemy's side
Oh, I've been asking for
Oh, I've been asking for problems, problems, problems

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The zipped covers had been delivered to his room whilst he slept, and were the first things he saw when he opened his eyes again. Now, standing before the open bag hanging from the wardrobe, he decides he will forgive Mohamed this trespass of his privacy due to how pleased he is with his suit. He still has to try it on, of course, but trusts Omar will have handled the measurements with utmost care and precision. Holding the tie between his hands like a fishmonger inspecting the quality of a catch, he scans his eyes over the swirling paisley, the silken surface gleaming a brilliant silver in the brightness of the room. Satisfied, he replaces it before turning his attention to the other bag hung alongside. Taking hold of the zipper, he pauses, changing his mind and taking down the bag before carrying it to the door. Beginning to open it, he pauses when he sees the other. Sat on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands, the man looks like a groom with cold feet.

So look me in the eyes, tell me what you see
Perfect paradise, tearing at the seams
I wish I could escape, I don't want to fake it
Wish I could erase it, make your heart believe

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But I'm a bad liar, bad liar

“Special delivery.”

Lifting his head at the sound of his voice, he sees Hannibal stepping into the room carrying a suit cover. Wearing just his shorts, his scars are stark in the brightness of the room. But it’s the bandaging on the man’s hand that catches his attention. As Hannibal moves to hang the bag on the wardrobe, Will stands and walks towards him. Drawing near, he sees small bruises spotting the other’s neck. Folds his arms when they’re stood abreast.
“What happened last night?” he asks, and sees the hands pausing with the cover half unzipped.
“We continued drinking,” says Hannibal after a moment. “You fell asleep.”
Will watches him pull the zipper down the rest of the way. Glances at those purple marks.
“You brought me back?” he says.
“Yes.”
“Then what.”
He suddenly sees Mohammed’s full lips fastened over the scar from Daniel’s attack and looks up from the other’s neck.
“I don’t remember,” answers Hannibal as he examines the contents of the bag.

I'm a bad liar, bad liar

Pretending to look at the suit, Will turns half a step towards the man. Licking his lips, he hesitates, reluctant to entertain the prospect of Hannibal finding himself in the Egyptian’s company again without his knowledge.
“Did he hurt you?” he says eventually, casual in tone as he continues to stand there with his arms

folded.
“It was accidental,” says Hannibal, looking mildly at his bandaged hand. Unsatisfied with the answer, Will reaches up his own to clasp the other’s wrist. The line of his scar there familiar to the touch. Hooded eyes look his way and he holds that expectant gaze.
“You wouldn’t do it without me?” he utters lowly, and sees those dark eyes looking him over.
“Hardly satisfying,” Hannibal begins to say, lofting his brows as he eyes remain on Will’s body.
“Without your sizeable penis.”
He feels his brows knitting at that unreadable expression.
“It would be considered rude to murder the groom on his own wedding day,” Hannibal adds, pulling smoothly from his grasp.
“Not something you haven’t thought of doing before,” Will can’t help retorting, and Hannibal smiles a small smile. His eyes lidding as he regards Will’s frown.
“How could I have done such a thing?” he says, turning around and beginning to pace back to the door. Reaching it, he stops and turns his face to the side. “I wasn’t invited,” he says before disappearing through the door.

I'm a bad liar, bad liar

Zaffa

Chapter Notes

Chapter intended to be read to the song 'Jealous' by Nick Jonas. A lyric only version can be found: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz26fJRg6i8

Suits: Will, Hannibal, Mohamed

Hunched over the sink, Will heaves the remaining contents of his stomach into the porcelain bowl before it is washed away by the flow of running water. Staring through lidded eyes at the plughole, he imagines Hannibal sat in his cell at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane the day he exchanged rings with Molly. He would be lying if he said he didn't think once about the other. Ever present, even in his physical absence, Hannibal did not leave him alone.

And though it had felt so much like torment at the time, he wonders now if it was, in its own way, a reassuring energy that enabled him to carry on as best as he could, knowing this channel remained open between them despite the distance and years spanning his refusal to see him. He'd received a card, of course, and had almost tossed it without opening. When he had finally broken the seal alone, Hannibal had expressed his congratulations inside and nothing more. No lofty references to art with a hidden meaning. No words with teeth. And yet the lack of provocation was in itself an insult. Will should have known then of the betrayal of his own subconscious. But he was too proud to succumb to the pining.

And unfortunately for him, said longing has since grown into something worse. It stares back at him now in the cold surface of the mirror. The notion of green-eyed jealousy comes to mind. *The green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on*. The eyes staring back are bloodshot red as they narrow at the thought of Hannibal being with their host alone. In Mohamed's territory, Will can't do anything right. Not by himself, not by Jack. Whilst Hannibal's flirtation with Daniel had been to provoke Will into action, this time, he can't help but feel somewhat threatened by the man's past history with the Egyptian. One that he is not privy to. And he can't help responding suspiciously to that evasiveness. What did they know that he didn't?

He sees Jack standing behind him in the mirror. An encouraging ghost. A symbol of hope. That all is not lost, if Will would just stop and turn around. Follow the light back to the good in his life. Where it is possible to share intimacy without a legacy of pain and anguish. To embrace and be embraced with nothing but simple and uncomplicated warmth. Let the pining be abated by the feel of Molly's arms and the sound of her laughter. Both of which he has abandoned once again to pursue what, exactly? It is impossible to find such comfort in the dark. Groping blindly for something he doesn't even know the shape of.

Unable to answer the question, he looks away from Jack's stare in the mirror. Taking the edge of his tee, he pulls it up over his head. When he lowers his arms, he pauses at his reflection. There is bruising over his lower abdomen. Small and uneven marks scattering the length of his scar. Putting down the tee on the side of the sink, he presses on the area with his fingertips. The bruising is worse on one side, the skin still tender when probed. Looking up at his own frown, he tries to think back to the night before but finds nothing linking to the marks.

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He stands side on in front of the full length mirror, knitting his brow at the hugging fabric. It would be vain to admit he cuts a fine shape in a well-tailored suit, but it ought to satisfy Hannibal's obsession with presentation. Fumbling with the complimentary cufflinks, he recalls standing in front of the Parisian cityscape with the man beside him. His hair combed. Wearing that ruthless aftershave.

Only you know what you want to be, Will.

He thinks of the tiny wolf held between the other's fingers. Then of the real one lying on the roadside somewhere between the giant rock formations and Kalambaka. Staring up at him with its yellow eyes as its blood slowly spread in the snow pile.

He doesn't recall packing the cufflinks and begins to head towards the door joining their rooms when he hears a jubilant cry of something foreign on the other side followed by that unmistakable *my friend*. Turning around, he heads back into the bathroom to make himself more presentable. Running a quick hand over his ungroomed facial hair and unkempt tresses. Spotting a small container amongst the complimentary sundries, he uses its contents to tame his more stubborn curls.

When he opens the door, it is to the sight of Mohamed filling a glass in Hannibal's hand. The former in a black tux. The latter in a light grey three piece that contrasts not only in hue with the other man's attire but also in cut. There is something decidedly refined yet flirtatious about the plunging horseshoe of Hannibal's waistcoat. The short row of buttons climbing a trim middle while offsetting the white space of his chest split down the middle by a strip of shimmering paisley. The close-fitting trousers emphasising his height as they hug the full length of his legs as well as the shapely swell of his behind. His hair, as is customary for special occasions, has been combed back immaculately. Will finds himself watching the other until he realises he is not the only one. Brown eyes give Hannibal an appreciative onceover as the champagne continues to flow.

I don't like the way he's looking at you
I'm starting to think you want him too
Am I crazy? Have I lost you?
Even though I know you love me
Can't help it

Slipping his hands into his pockets, Will stands a little straighter.
"Bit early for that, don't you think," he says, observing the way Mohamed's smile deepens as he continues to pour.

“We start the way we mean to finish, Mr Graham,” their host chuckles. “In case you have forgotten,” he continues to say, spreading his arms out to the sides, “I’m getting fucking married!”
“You forgot your cufflinks,” says Hannibal.
“Fuck,” Mohamed curses, looking down at his cuffs. “Here,” he says, stepping up to thrust the bottle at Will. Those dark eyes glance down at his hands. "Can't be letting the standards slip now, can we?" They glance back up with an arched eyebrow at Will's linkless cuffs. Holding that amused gaze, Will takes the bottle as the man turns and walks out of the room.

“Where’s your tie?” Hannibal asks, walking over and offering him one of the flutes.
“You want to help me with it?” says Will, taking the glass even though the thought of drink makes his stomach turn.
“Bring it to me.”

He stands there as Hannibal upturns his shirt collar and slides the woven strip around his neck.
“Do I look like I need a shave?” he asks. Mohamed’s perfectly groomed beard is making him feel untidy.
“Yes,” says Hannibal, his eyes on the knot he is beginning to tie.
Will hums.
“Chin up, please.”
He complies, lifting his eyes to watch the other’s face. The man smells good.

I turn my cheek, music up
And I'm puffing my chest
I'm getting ready to face you
Can call me obsessed

The sound of approaching footsteps signal the return of their host. Finishing with Will’s tie, Hannibal takes his glass back and turns to face the Egyptian as he reenters the room.
“You have made quite the impression, Dr Lecter,” announces Mohamed. “Mr Hussain is already here and waiting,” he continues to say, coming over and slapping his hand on Hannibal’s shoulder. “Considering it’s our custom to be fashionably late, the man seems ready to eat you alive.”

It's not your fault that they hover
I mean no disrespect
It's my right to be hellish
I still get jealous

“Quite,” says Hannibal lightly with a glance at Will. “Join us when you’re ready,” he says, and Will watches them walk out of the room together, his eyes on Mohamed’s arm slung over Hannibal’s shoulders.

You’re too sexy beautiful
Everybody wants to taste
That’s why
I still get jealous

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I wish you didn’t have to post it all
I wish you’d save a little bit just for me
Protective or possessive
Call it passive or aggressive

Obscured by the pillar, Will stands at the railing watching Hannibal crossing the private space of the courtyard below with Mr Hussain. The man appears of similar age to Hannibal. Slightly shorter in stature. Slighter. Wearing his hair long enough to be combed back from his heavily bearded face, the ends of which curl roguishly at his nape. A pair of fashionable glasses perch on the bridge of his nose. Dark red and thick framed, they give him a youthful appearance. Will can't remember where his own glasses are and doubts any corrective eye wear will be able to help him see more clearly into the matter of things. The two men pause beneath a pointed archway, and Will takes a good look at those smiling lips, imagining them pinching Hannibal's pulse between them. The stroke of his dense facial hair against Hannibal's scar. His hand slips up to stroke absently at his own beard as he watches the man laughing at something Hannibal said. By the look of those lidded eyes behind the lenses - the crinkling at their corners - the man appears thoroughly charmed by his fellow cannibal.

I turn my cheek, music up
And I'm puffing my chest
I'm getting ready to face you
Can call me obsessed

Sensing a presence by his side, he turns his face and looks down to see a cluster of wild black curls. The child lifts their face to stare up at him with large brown eyes.
"Sorry to disturb you," says a voice from behind and Will looks back over his shoulder to see a young woman in a pale hijab making her way over to the infant. Her smooth brow knitting anxiously as she gathers her charge against her.
"I didn't expect to see children here," he says, turning to face her and looking again at the child who continues to watch him.
"You are not supposed to," she explains, gaze lowering upon her hand as it comes to rest upon the child's head. "I'm to keep him from disturbing the guests, but it's not easy," she continues to say. "So many people and nobody to play with. There's only so much a little boy can do with his nanny before he decides to go exploring."
"His nanny," Will echoes, hands slipping into his pockets. The girl looks up at him then lowers her gaze again as though regretting having spoken.
"Yes," she says hesitantly with a nod, eyes lifting once more. Large and open, their reflective surfaces are easy to read. A long standing fear haunts the pupils despite her youth. "My name is Mariah."
"Nice to meet you."
"This is Kosey."
"Nice to meet you too, Kosey."

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It's not your fault that they hover
I mean no disrespect
It's my right to be hellish
I still get jealous

As his company steps aside to take a phone call, he glances up at the balcony and sees Will conversing with the nanny and her ward. Of course they would end up crossing paths.*The innocents above and the wicked below*. He watches the girl. Remembers how apprehensive she was of him the first time Mohamed had introduced them. Nervous of disposition but deriving strength from some stubborn inner virtue. She reminds him very much of Will in the past, and the sudden fondness bubbling forth nostalgically at the memory of the man's innocence makes it impossible to despise her.

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You're too sexy beautiful
Everybody wants to taste
That's why
I still get jealous

After Mariah and the boy slips away back into the living quarters, Will loses sight of Hannibal. Wandering down to the courtyard, he makes the acquaintance of a small group of art professors. Presuming them to be Mohamed's colleagues, he still suspects it all to be a cover up. As he sips at his drink, he can feel Alima, Mr Hussain's wife, staring at the scar on his face. The others have moved ahead to speak to another cluster of people while she lingers at his side.
"An interesting position, don't you think," she begins to say. "Being partner to one whose hobbies can only be described as…"
At the pause, Will glances into her smoky eyes.
"Unique," she says eventually, red lips pulling into a shrewd smile.
"That's one word for it," says Will, looking towards the entrance to see Hannibal being introduced to a couple by her husband.
"I have one word for you."
At the low and flirtatious tone of her voice, Will lofts his brows and meets her dark gaze over the rim of his glass.
"Oh?"
"Intriguing," she murmurs, lifting the glass to her lips as she gives him a onceover through the veil of her lashes.

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You're too sexy beautiful
Everybody wants to taste
That's why
I still get jealous

"I suppose you suspect my wife of immodesty," chuckles the man, and Hannibal turns his eyes from Will and the attractive young woman to regard those lofted brows. "And yet I deem it permissible," he continues to say as he watches his wife across the courtyard. "Given her allowances for my proclivities."
"How generous of you," says Hannibal with a polite smile.
"Too generous?" asks the other.
"Instead of making allowances, I should like my company to embrace that which they so generously claim to excuse," says Hannibal, continuing to smile.

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Finally, he sees Hannibal stepping away from company to approach the waiter, and follows suit. Approaching the other from behind, he waits until Hannibal has exchanged his empty flute for a fresh one before doing the same. With a polite nod, the waiter moves on, leaving them alone.
"Getting friendly with the missus," says Hannibal before taking a sip from his glass.
"You were busy making a new bestie," Will drawls lowly, also lifting his glass. "I was just balancing things out."
"Maybe we should have a foursome."
"The human patties in bed with the cannibals?" Will scoffs.
"You may have Alima if you find her more to your taste."
"I don't think oral sex counts as cannibalism," he utters.
"I shall give you half a point for tickling your taste buds, nonetheless."

“While you do what, chew on her husband's dick?”
“Maybe we’d chew each other’s dicks,” says Hannibal lightly.
“You’re disgusting," Will utters under his breath.
“On a serious note. It appears the brothers showed Jack a photo of us at the Holy Trinity."
At the mention of Jack's name, Will hesitates.
"I have his notebook," Hannibal continues to say.
"How did you get it?" Will asks quietly.
"Mohamed."
Will frowns but doesn't immediately comment. He takes a deep gulp from his glass.
"So they know who we are, then," he says eventually.
"I suspect they could be members of the underground establishment," says Hannibal. "Shutting up shop to hunt for the finest ingredients across Europe."
"Holy meat."
"Aged well."
"They could've taken you," says Will cynically.
"My body remains soft and supple," says Hannibal coolly. "If they wanted popping sinew and pizzle as unpliable as your self-righteousness, you would have made the perfect candidate. The real challenge would be finding someone willing to stomach such a repulsive dish."
"Rudeness aside," says Will, “what’s the plan?”
“Acquiring access to the establishment.”
“Do you think there will be another response?”
“I guess we shall have to wait and see.”

A commotion of lively drumming accompanied by the reedy blast of an enthusiastic trumpeter explodes into the air of the courtyard. In response, the guests around them immediately begin cheering.
"That's the signal I presume," Will utters under his breath as he lifts the glass to his lips, watching the crowd begin to move down the courtyard towards the clamour. "Make way for his lordship."
"Perhaps you will thank him when you see the belly dancers," says Hannibal.
“Belly dancers," says Will, arching an eyebrow.
“They are a traditional part of the zaffa,” the man explains, “which in itself is an ancient Egyptian tradition predating Islam.”
Most of the guests have now made their way indoors. Will doesn’t move from the spot. Notices Hannibal doesn’t, neither.
“I’ve heard the bride will be wearing a niqab with only her eyes showing,” comments Hannibal as he sips savouringly at the last of his champagne. “It’s not common practice, but rumour is she wears one to hide her jealousy from the guests.”
“Can't blame her,” says Will idly. "Knowing him, the belly dancers will be wearing next to nothing."
“It’s a good job I wasn’t at your wedding.”
Snorting at the unexpected comment, Will looks at that calm countenance.

You’re the only one invited
I said there’s no one else for you

“Because you’d turn up wearing nothing but bells?” he says drily, raising an eyebrow.
“Bells or no, I would have turned your head,” says Hannibal, matter-of-fact.
Will hums, feigning indifference as he gazes ahead.
“Molly’s not the jealous type,” he finally utters.
"Perhaps if she saw you now."

Cos you know I get excited

He looks at Hannibal stood beside him. Watches him draining the last of his champagne.
"Is that meant to be a compliment?" he asks lowly.
"Are you looking for one?" asks Hannibal in return. Lofting his invisible brows. Ignoring the remark, Will starts walking down the courtyard.
"I'm sure you looked marvellous on your wedding day," says the man from behind him. Despite the neutrality of his tone, Will can't help feeling goaded by his words. Suspects the topic will always be linked to the other's bitterness and his own anger. Anger because, even on his wedding day, he couldn't escape the thought of him.
Stopping under a pointed archway, Will turns around. In the empty space of the courtyard, Hannibal looks immaculate and very much alone. Too proud, of course, to ever admit he had waited patiently for Will's visit during his incarceration. Feeling the mounting disappointment as the days passed.
"Would you have done it if you had managed to get out?" he asks suddenly. "Kill me on my wedding day?"
"Till death do us part," says Hannibal, walking up to stand with him under the arch.
"Is that a yes?" Will utters flatly.
"Aren't you supposed to be down on one knee?" says Hannibal.
Choosing not to respond, Will starts walking.
"Or was it Molly?"
"Does it matter?"
"Not at all."
Despite the disparagement of his words, Will knows there is also denial and hurt. And because of this, he drops the retort and continues to walk in silence with the man beside him.

When you get jealous too

Raqs sharqi

Chapter Notes

> The chapter is intended to be read to the first 3 minutes of a karshilagala drum solo from the paragraph beginning 'A countdown can be heard'. The timings indicated above the paragraphs reflect the three different speeds of drumming and are intended to match what is happening in the story.
>
> The solo can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b55NkArJxCg

A typical traditional Egyptian wedding would have taken place in the evening, but this is Mohamed they are talking about. The man picks and chooses what he enjoys about his culture and what he would rather do without. Consequently, the guests had spent a large part of the day partaking in the lengthy procession of the bride and groom under the lively orchestration of the zaffa, witnessed the groom being tossed into the air, and joined the newly wedded couple in an endless wave of singing and dancing. A sumptuous banquet had been laid out before them, the drinks constantly flowing. Will noticed Hannibal hadn't touched any of the food. Chose instead to steadily drink his fill as the next performers came to the floor. Since their brief conversation in the courtyard, they hadn't really spoken, and Will found himself attracting the unwanted attention of the professors more than once. Had to use the excuse of needing the restroom when Alima came on too hard with her flirtation, and spent a good amount of time avoiding her and her circle. He saw Hannibal once, leaning against a pillar with a glass of something in his hand, and was ready to weave his way over when he realised Mr Hussain was stood on the other side and speaking to him still. It seemed the man would never run out of things to talk about.

The flaming swords of the dancer are thrown once more into the air before the man leaps and rolls himself forward – his hands darting out to catch the handles just in time for a finishing flourish that coincides with the final beat of the drum. The room erupts with cheering and applause as he bows. An assistant hurries over to help extinguish the fire, and Will sees a group of musicians moving forward to seat themselves amongst the plush cushions strewn across the marble step. Behind them, at the heavily decorated end of the room, Mohamed and his bride sit on throne like chairs, the former occasionally leaning across the arm to speak into the latter's ear. With the veil obscuring her face, it is difficult to read the bride's response to the festivities, but if the attentiveness of her dark, wide-eyed gaze with which she regards Mohamed is anything to go by, it would seem he has her approval. For now, at least.

0.00 - 1.22

A countdown can be heard spoken by the lead musician before he falls immediately to drumming out a rapid rhythm on his tabla. Emerging from the crowds, a young female takes the floor. Unlike the other performers, her appearance is not marked by cheering. Instead, it's as though the guests are too mesmerised by her sensuous beauty to remember to clap their hands. Earlier, a different belly dancer had preceded Mohamed and his bride as they emerged at the top of the mansion's imperial staircase and began their slow descent to the commotion of the zaffa musicians lined up with their instruments on either side of the stairway. But now, performing solo and without the distraction of company, the dancer has the attention of all eyes in the room, and each calculated step is made to titillate the

audience as she gives them a taste of what is to come with slowly twisting arms and hips adorned with swishing coins on golden chain. The steady beat of the tabla and the high pitched trill of the tambourine slows to build tension, then doubles suddenly in pace before finally exploding into a rhythm so charged with energy, it's possible to feel the vibrations filling the air all around them. Curious as to what Hannibal makes of such a tempting display, Will takes his eyes off cleavage and torso to scan searchingly amongst the wealth of bodies stood around watching in collective awe. Across the room, he spies the other standing back from the crowd, leaning against a pillar. With the guests in front of him distracted by the performance, someone comes his way – past the craning necks of the guests, Will sees the profile of the dancer from earlier. Has to tilt his head to catch her giving Hannibal a look from the corners of her darkly drawn eyes before she slips out of the room. Continuing to gaze in the same direction as the others, Hannibal lifts his glass to take a sip. As his hand lowers, he pushes off the pillar and turns around. Will watches his grey suit disappearing from sight. An instinctive glance to the end of the room shows him the bride surrounded and distracted by a group of chattering female friends or relatives. But the throne beside her sits unoccupied. Paranoia prickling at his nape, he starts to make his way out of the room, slipping past the clustered bodies of standing guests and taking care to avoid being spotted by Alima and other acquaintances.

1.23 - 2.08

Except for the hired staff to-ing and fro-ing with their trays laden with full and empty glasses, or the occasional performer returning to the entertaining room, the corridors are mostly empty. Looking ahead, Will sees the back of Mohamed disappearing round the corner, and starts to follow him from a distance. Having done what feels like a lap around the floor, he hangs back from the next corner and peers carefully around it to watch Mohamed approaching the double doors of a room, one of which stands open. Without hesitating, he walks inside, and the door is pushed to a close behind him. On this side of the house, the music can be heard as clearly as though the band is playing on the other side. Glancing quickly behind him and finding the close clear, Will walks towards the room. Pauses with his hand on the handle of the door before pushing down on the heavy metal and letting himself in.

The space appears to be another entertaining room with a grand piano taking up the centre, the hulking presence of which seems at odds with the Middle Eastern music currently penetrating the walls. Mohamed is sat astride the piano bench. Hannibal is leaning against the polished instrument, glass still in hand as the two of them watch the girl dancing hard for them. Lips parted to catch her breath as she spins on the spot whilst moving her torso in time to the artful rise and fall of her arms. Each beat of the tabla accentuated by her shaking hips. The coins jangling as they whip back and forth with each movement. Thus occupied, none of them seem to notice Will at the threshold. A look is exchanged between Mohamed and Hannibal – a mere lofting of those dark brows, the meaning of which could be anything, yet it spurs the latter into pushing off the piano and beginning to take off his suit jacket. The rhythm of the tabla reaches its peak, growing too fast for even the dancer, and Will watches Mohamed sliding to the end of the bench before suddenly lunging forward. The girl gives out a squeak of surprise as he snatches her around the waist with his arms and pulls her down onto his lap. "Watch," he commands.

2.10 - 3.10

The tabla beats slowly. Lifting his arms, Hannibal starts to move with the rhythm, his body undulating fluidly in seamless waves despite the tight confines of his figure-hugging garments. Eyes lidded and lashes low, Hannibal watches his audience seductively as he turns suddenly on the spot and starts shaking his hips to a flurry of drumming fingers. Jaw flexing, Will steps into the room.
"Mr Graham," Mohamed says in greeting without taking his eyes off Hannibal who continues to dance. The girl laughs as she cheers him on, clapping in time, and Hannibal smiles back. Those black eyes glazed with intoxication. Will wants to take him by the arm and pull him outside. "Have you

come to join us?" Mohamed asks, and Will folds his arms, trying his best to ignore Hannibal's provocative dancing.
"They're looking for you," he lies, and sees the Egyptian lofting his brows.
"Who."
"Your wife."
"Alright," Mohamed exhales, arms tightening on the dancer's middle. "He's all yours," he grunts as he stands, lifting the girl onto her feet. "Enjoy," he says with a wink before dragging the dancer out with him by the hand.

Will waits until the door has swung to a close before starting to face the other. As he does, he feels hands grabbing him by the edges of his suit jacket and shoving him back against the piano bench. Falling onto it with a grunt, Will presses his lips together as Hannibal straddles him. Looks up into sultry black as the man grabs his tie and starts to roll his hips to the dragging beat of the tabla. His arse grinding in a tight circle against his rapidly growing arousal. Swallowing, Will puts his hands on Hannibal's hips. Squeezes them hard as he stares up with a lick to his lips. The drum rolls and Will continues to stare, unable to look away as Hannibal leans back with Will's tie wrapped around his fist to undulate bodily against him. Swallowing against the constraint of the tie, Will digs his fingers into those cruel hips, mesmerised by the starved look in the other's eyes. The drum rolls on in mimicry of his soaring pulse, reaches a climax, then stops abruptly to a rush of applause. Hannibal sits still in his lap, back arched and chest heaving gently as he breathes through lips hanging slightly agape. His high cheekbones flushed with drink. His fist pulling the tie taut.

The door opens and Will hurriedly pushes Hannibal off before standing. His hands clasping in front of him to hide the effect of being given an unexpected lap dance by the other. Kosey's face appears in the gap and Will glances aside to find Hannibal straightening himself up.
"Hey…" Will utters hesitantly as the boy steps curiously into the room. "Where's Mariah?"
The one in question appears in the gap behind Kosey. Snatching his hand, she looks apologetically at Will before glancing unsurely at Hannibal.
"Sorry," she says, and Will hears her chiding the boy quietly as he is pulled gently back through the door and out of sight.

"William Murdoch was the man in charge when the iceberg was sighted."
Turning around, Will finds Hannibal sat on the piano bench.
"He also had a dog," Hannibal continues to say, fingers stroking absently at the keys. Pacing towards him, Will leans his hip against the end of the instrument and folds his arms.
"Why are we talking about the Titanic?" he asks.
"Women and children," says Hannibal simply, and Will watches until those hooded eyes look up.
"Nobody knows what order he gave," he continues to say, gaze dropping again to the piano, "or what happened to him."
"What do you think happened to him?" Will asks quietly.
"I don't know," answers Hannibal with a tilt to his head. "I think he shoots himself in the movie."
"I can't imagine you watching that," Will murmurs.
"Would you do it," Hannibal asks as though he has not heard him.
"Do what…?"
"Shoot yourself. Because you feel responsible for all those innocent lives."
Exhaling, Will unfolds his arms and moves to sit down on the bench beside Hannibal, facing the doors. Leaning over, he folds his arms upon his knees and gazes at the floor.
"You're not planning to crash the wedding are you," he snorts quietly.
"You're Murdoch," Hannibal murmurs behind him. "Captain or iceberg, I'm just waiting."
"I wish you would just say what it is you're thinking."
"I'm thinking Molly must have sat on your knee and enjoyed looking down at you on the big day."
"I wasn't wearing such a nice suit."

He feels the weight of Hannibal's head on his right shoulder.
"You don't need it."
Slowly leaning his head against the other's, Will glances askance.
"I drank too much last night," he utters quietly.
"You did."
Knitting his brow, Will hesitates.
"If I was too…"
"I believe you mistake me for a blushing virgin."
"Did you go to him?"
"No."
"And your hand?"
"I dropped a bottle."
Pause.
"Your neck..."
"Is a mess, no thanks to you."
Will presses a hand over his eyes. Sits like that for a while as musicians can be heard on the other side testing their instruments for the next bout of singing or dancing.
"Do you have any more questions?" Hannibal eventually asks.
"Yeah," Will answers, straightening up. "Do you want to get out of here?"
"Sure," says Hannibal without hesitation.

Armani Prive

Chapter Notes

Clubbing part of the chapter is intended to be read to the song 'Unforgettable' by French Montana. A lyric only version can be found: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QG9cd521EOY

Hannibal asked for the keys to Mohamed's car and got them. Will does not pause to speculate on the Egyptian's generosity. It's pretty much a given, it seems, that what Hannibal wants, the host freely provides. Will still cannot explain why, and continues to pretend he doesn't care to find out. Stepping out into the mild temperature of the early evening, he glances back at Mohamed's doormen stood at the entrance of the mansion exchanging words. Although he doesn't understand Arabic, he has a feeling they are more preoccupied with other guests at the wedding – again, for reasons he would rather not know about – and resumes following Hannibal past the sloshing fountain and across the polished paving of the extensive driveway now home to a number of expensive looking vehicles.

The car Hannibal stands before is a Mercedes S-Class Cabriolet with its top already down. Silver with a red interior. Its sportier sibling, the GT Coupe, sits impressively behind it. Perhaps Mohamed is too precious about this one, Will thinks to himself as he stops beside the other with his hands in his pockets. Above them, the fronds of the palm trees are rustling gently in the breeze.
"I'm driving," says Will. Without protest, Hannibal chucks him the keys and walks round to the passenger door. His cheekbones still flushed. His hooded eyes half-drawn with easy complacency. Having lost the waistcoat, Hannibal opens the door and slides down onto new leather in his grey suit

and white shirt open at the neck. Climbing in the driver side, Will pulls the door to. Checks and makes adjustments to the seat before buckling up and clasping the wheel. The leather feels good beneath his fingers. Turning his face, he watches the other making his own adjustments. It takes a little longer because Hannibal is still under the influence, and his fingers are clumsier than usual. Will observes him shifting his seat more upright, then back, then all the way down, then all the way back up again. Aware of being watched, Hannibal lofts his invisible brows at Will as he continues to mess with the settings, finally settling on a far recline.
“Comfortable?” Will asks drily as the other rests an arm atop the car door and runs his hand through his hair. Before leaving, he had piled on the cologne and restyled his immaculate comb-back so a couple of sharp tresses hang rakishly over his brow.
“You’ve groomed your beard like I told you,” he says approvingly, and Will looks away from those hooded eyes.
“You were taking your time,” he utters.
“My apologies. I got so excited at the prospect of going out with you, I had to pleasure myself in the restroom. Twice.”
Will grunts in acknowledgement, but chooses not to share with the other the fact that he also had to beat one out post personal lap dance. Courtesy of yours truly.
“Where are we going?” he asks, eyes on the orange-blue gradient of the horizon.

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With it being the coolest, most palatable climate of the year, Hannibal is intent on enjoying the best outdoor bars and restaurants. Which is why Will finds himself sat in a comfortable chair at the furthest corner of the rooftop lounge, staring past his company’s shoulder at the tallest building in the world as daylight continues to fade.
“Food may not be the answer to world peace,” Hannibal reads aloud the quote from the menu, “but it’s a start.”
“Corrupt world leaders served in chunks,” Will utters as he continues to observe the design of the Burj Khalifa, standing in the near distance like a sharp implement glinting with sunset.
“Is that a business proposal?” Hannibal asks, and Will glances at those hooded eyes as they continue to peruse the pretentious menu. The spikes of his hair stroking across his brow in the breeze and adding the final touch to his suave, cosmopolitan appearance. Looking very much at home in this part of the world where luxury is a lifestyle, and the man could easily be just another CEO or filthy rich tycoon.

“Doing a moral service by serving delectable morsels,” Hannibal continues to say, reaching for his glass and lifting it to his lips. “I’ll take you under my wing as commis chef. Show you my ins and outs.”
Watching those sharp lips part to the flowing wine, Will feels his brows lofting at the remark. Would not for a second have doubted the innuendo if he had not watched Hannibal like a hawk all day and known him to have gorged on nothing but drink. And now that he feels himself beginning to sober up, he is hasty to swallow whatever is expensive on the menu. It was Will who had finally suggested they ordered something to eat. It’s hard for him to imagine it actually happening, but he doesn’t want the other vomiting in public and regretting it later. Something tells him Hannibal would loathe such a schoolboy faux pas.
“We were already doing that,” he says quietly, lifting his own glass and taking a slow sip. Swallowing, he licks his lips and looks up to meet the black slits of his thoughtful gaze. “You just didn’t have an expensive kitchen.”
“No,” Hannibal agrees, voice soft as he tilts his head in recollection, eyes returning to the menu in his hand. “I had a huge dog who’d come hounding for scraps instead.”
“And did you give him any?” Will asks lightly.

“Just yours,” Hannibal answers, equally as lightly.
“I never left any scraps.”
“Of course you did,” says Hannibal dismissively, taking another gulp of his wine. “You are woefully lacking in table manners after all.”
“I’m lacking in table manners.”
“Yes.”
“How.”
“You make a habit of regurgitating anything I prepare for you. At least the dog appreciates my efforts.”
“So you fed him.”
“It’s lonely being the sole appreciator of one’s passions.”
“So get your own dog.”
“I didn’t want this one. But you just had to use your Will Graham eyes on me.”
“Will Graham eyes.”
“Yes. Like a pathetic, half drowned baby dog.”
“Harsh,” Will utters, struggling to keep his frown from twisting into a smile.
“I have to be,” Hannibal snaps haughtily, “or you’d turn into a spoilt little bitch running circles around me until I fall off the next cliff.”
Will parts his lips and hesitates as he watches the other drain the last of his wine before looking up to make eye contact with a waiter. Taking a sip from his own glass, Will glances down at the table between them.
“Have you decided what you want?” he asks instead.
“Have you?” Hannibal asks back. Flippant. Eyes refusing to meet his. Leaning back slowly in his chair, Will exhales inwardly and returns his attention to the highest point of the world’s tallest building. Decides he will need another drink when he’s finished the current one.

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Climbing out of the car, Will hands the keys to the parking valet and steps back as the other slides in. When it has pulled away and disappeared into the hotel’s underground parking, he looks across to see Hannibal stood with his hands in his pockets, watching up at the lofty building.
“Imagine chasing Dolarhyde up this magnificent beast,” he says with a smile. Will scales the endless walls of steel and glass with his eyes – the peak not visible from where they stand beneath the towering structure, yet making itself known nonetheless by its bright electric glow made the more prominent by the black backdrop of the sky. When he was flailing in the water that night, he had also looked up at the cliff from where they had hurtled from, and could just about make out the soft light of the house emanating weakly against the dark.
“You’d bleed out before you reach the top,” says Will.
“Would you carry on without me?” Hannibal asks, and he brings his gaze down to that relaxed countenance. So at odds with the expression he wore that night. The contortion of effort in his brow exposed by the cold moonlight as he hooked his arm around Will’s neck and pulled him against himself. His loud breaths of exertion mingling with the lapping water in Will’s ear.
Suddenly growing impatient, Will ignores the question and starts walking towards the entrance of the hotel. Doesn’t know where he is going, but simply tells the doorman he’s looking to get hammered and is told the Armani Prive nightclub is located on the first floor of the establishment.

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It's not good enough for me
Since I been with you

As he waits for their drinks, he turns his face and glances back over his shoulder. Past the bobbing heads of the best dressed in the city, he sees him sat on the plush seating in front of the DJ. A girl – American – already sliding close beside him, although he pretends not to notice. She leans in, parts her lips to make greeting. He makes eye contact, and she continues to speak smilingly, but realises he cannot hear her over the music, so scoots closer. Hand resting on his thigh as her lips stop short from kissing the shell of his ear. The contours of their faces lit up by the fluorescent blue glow of the bright geometric pattern projecting off the wall screen serving as the main source of lighting in the room. Even from the bar, he can see it brings the colour out in his eyes.

It's not gonna work for you
Nobody can equal me

"You move fast," he says.
"Too fast?" the girl beside him asks, and he turns his eyes on her red-lipped smile. Leaning with her arms folded on the bar, she strokes the stem of her half empty glass with a shapely claw.
"For my friend, perhaps," he says, and sees her smoky eyes looking over towards the DJ.
"He looks shy," she comments, corner of her mouth tugging upwards. "Unusual for someone dangerous."
His drinks are placed in front of him. He orders another for the girl. Feels her eyes watching him closely.
"You assume he is because of the scar," he says, picking up his glass.
"Are you?" she asks, and he presses the rim to his lips before swallowing slowly. His eyes giving her an appreciative once-over.

I'm gonna sip on this drink
When I'm fucked up
I should know how to pick up

"Am I?" he echoes afterwards.
"Dangerous," she says, eyes glinting with curiosity.

I'm gonna catch the rhythm
While she push up against me
Ooh and she tipsy

"That's for you to find out," he says, eyes lidding as he gives her one more look from the corners before taking his drinks and turning from the bar.

I had enough convo for twentyfour
I peeped you from across the room
Pretty little body dancing like GoGo, ay

Watching Hannibal weaving his way through the dancing bodies followed by a girl, Will realises the other must have requested the cabriolet over the GT because the latter is only a two seater. He knows Dubai has certain rules they must follow to avoid getting into trouble with the law. Unlike Greece, there will be no being propositioned by cocksure young men at the bar or in the restroom. No fighting. And none of that unabashed fooling around on the dance floor between two men. Even if the memory of Hannibal moving against him has already sparked a traitorous twinge from somewhere deep down. Wriggling like a snake trying to free its tail from the wobbling rock of his composure. As Hannibal approaches them, he shifts his leg away from the girl's hand, conscious of how close-fitting his tailored trousers are.

You are unforgettable
I need to get you alone

It's pointless trying to speak when the music is playing so loudly. But he carries on shouting into her ear if only to mask his own distraction. Hannibal is dancing in front of them with the other girl. With barely a fraction of the aggressive, sexual charge Will had felt passing between them through the last female they had danced with, there isn't really a reason to be staring. But he does. Because every time he looks away, he feels those eyes watching him. And every time he tries to catch the other looking, they move away again. It's worse knowing Hannibal has the excuse of cultural etiquette – if not the law itself – to ignore him. Knowing what it does. Glancing down at the bare thigh pressed against him, Will decides to play his game.

Why not?
A fucking good time never hurt nobody

The next time she leans in to speak into his ear, he turns his cheek just enough to brush his lips against hers. Lashes lowering at his show of intent, she watches his hand slipping onto her thigh. Holds still as he strokes the shell of her ear with the words *do you want to get out of here*. He leans in to hear her shout *I've been waiting for you to say that*. Picks up his drink and downs it in one go. Catches black from the corners as he plonks the empty glass on the table. *Finally*.

I got a little drink but it's not Bacardi
If you loved the girl then I'm so so sorry
I got to give it to her like we in a marriage

Catching her hand, he stands and steps up to Hannibal. Leans in close enough to accidentally brush his mouth against his ear as he speaks.
"We're leaving."
Leaning back, he lofts his brows at the other before walking so determinedly towards the club entrance, the girl has to totter hurriedly in her heels after him.

Oh, like we in a hurry
No, no, I won't tell nobody
You're on your level too
Tryna do what lovers do

Eyes lidded, he watches Will leave with the girl.
"Not so shy after all," he hears his company say.
A smile lifts his lips and he takes her hand in his.
"Are we going?" she asks.
"We have to," he answers. "He has the keys to the car."

You are unforgettable
I need to get you alone

++++

Now you wanna choose
Just popped bubbly in the 'cuzi

Despite the confident, almost arrogant manner in which he conducts himself, Will already regrets

calling the shots. He had assumed Hannibal had made it known to Mohamed that they would be hitting downtown Dubai with the intention of bringing back company. The practice of which seems rather risqué in such a conservative country, and yet is one that apparently does not phase the Egyptian and his liberal sensibilities. Wedding day or no. And Will wouldn't be surprised if the man had the means of pulling a few strings even if their raffish behaviour did land them in trouble with the authorities. He imagines that after pulling onto the drive, the doormen would show them some back way, alternate access to their rooms so as to avoid them bumping into guests. What a guy. Who would not want a friend like that? He should be loving life right now, he can imagine the man chiding him. Taking full advantage of that ridiculous, almost sickening generosity, and living up to the stereotype of white foreigners hell-bent on disregarding another country's social etiquette to do whatever the hell they please because they have money. Or powerful connections. Nevermind that he doesn't trust Mohamed as far as he can throw him. *And Hannibal? Well. The man's clearly enjoying himself*.

The last time he looked in the rear view mirror, the other had his eyes closed as the girl kissed along his jawline. Her talons splayed against his chest. At the sensation of a hand slipping onto his thigh, Will had returned his eyes to the empty road. Leant back in the seat as those deft fingers worked on his belt. Let his eyes fall to a half close as he thought about the drive back to Thessaloniki.

It's not good enough for me
Since I been with you

He exhales inwardly as he feels himself being exposed and stroked with eager lips and tongue which are nowhere as ravenous as he wants. As he needs. And as he fixates on the rolling asphalt stretching into the desert ahead, he thinks he sees something – from memory or his own fantasies, he cannot be sure, but when a muffled sound of surprise escapes from the busy industry in his lap, he clenches his jaw at the haunting image of those sharp lips wrapped around him. Thinks he can recall the sensation of his cock rubbing against the entrance to his throat as it tries to swallow him whole. And does. The edges of his teeth sharper than the ones accidentally scraping against him now as she struggles with the full weight of his pent up frustration. He feels eyes on him again, but refuses to look. Deliberately lets slip the occasional groan instead as the unmistakable sound of fervid fellatio fills the enclosed space of the cabriolet. Because, as unpleasant as it is to be forever reminded of his mistake, it is worse when the other decides to call his bluff. And Will knows he has nothing else really to blame but his own stubbornness as he refuses to beg for that hand to reach out and help him up. The hand that had clasped him so freely and with such open relief that night on the bluff. That hand that, once bit, continues to backhand him again and again. And yet. Despite it all. He still wants it. More than anything.

Sharing is Caring

Chapter Notes

Chapter intended to be read to the song 'Chains' by Nick Jonas. A lyric only version can be found: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bF0n7ShJLtE

Warning: Explicit description of heterosexual sex

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As expected, Mohamed's men had turned a blind eye to them parking up and getting out of the cabriolet with a couple of strangers. Although it had been Will's decision to leave the nightclub, much of his initial bravado had evaporated during the drive when, on the verge of reaching his climax under the girl's ministrations, he had fought to rein it in and get things back under control by taking himself in hand and hurriedly putting himself away. The girl hadn't taken offence. Merely whispered in his ear about having a better place for him to put it later. And he'd glanced up into the rear view mirror then to see Hannibal watching him with a knowing smile as his company leaned in to trace the line of his cruel mouth with the tip of her tongue.

Holding a stranger's hand, Will follows Hannibal as he leads the way back to their rooms via some empty and unused path where the music playing from inside the vast premises continues to hum albeit quieter now in the background. Watching the points of the stilettos in front of him, Will struggles against the hedonistic trappings he'd helped to spin and entangle himself in. After what happened in Thessaloniki, he should know better. Instead, he's hedging his bets on their wait for the brothers – assuming it is them – to respond, therefore removing the need for Hannibal to seek out new unsuspecting victims to slake that bloodlust and hankering for artistic licence of the most terrifying kind. But that itself is based on the presumption that Hannibal is not just doing things on a whim. A presumption that may seem exceptionally foolish and reckless, even if Will believes there is always something underlying every seemingly random spur of the moment in their time together. The purpose of which is always, it appears, to gauge his reaction. Maybe it is arrogant to continue to believe his presence has enough power to stop the man from going on a killing spree. Because Will knows the other misses it. The hunting. The outwitting. The eating. He misses it too, when, for a short while, it seemed like they had reached a compromise and were fighting on the same side. But he knows now that Hannibal had only been holding back, although for what, he can only guess. For Will to step up, most likely, based on their last conflict. When the anger of the other's disappointment had culminated in the form of plane tickets – an invitation to walk out now if Will can't handle it. The mere thought of which still causes him pain.

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"Play nice," he says, watching the way Will comes out of his thoughts at the sound of his voice. Those blue eyes recognising his own bedroom door that Hannibal holds open before him before darting to meet his questioningly. He lofts his brows impassively at that confused expression, and sees Will parting his lips. But before he can ask, the girls are pulling him, one on each arm, into the room. Amidst their giggling, Hannibal can hear his hesitant utterance of *wait* followed by what sounds like stumbling and more stifled laughter. Grasping the handle, he pulls the door to and turns to his own room.

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Caught between the two women, Will struggles to move as he feels one sliding her arms around his waist from behind whilst the other sinks to her knees before him.
“Wait,” he utters again, catching the hands on his belt, but they pull free as smoky eyes stare up at him from the weight of her lashes, holding his troubled gaze as she tugs his shirt out of his trousers and begins hurriedly undoing buttons. A sharp pain in his ear makes him jerk, reminding him of the other girl’s presence, the edges of her teeth clamping down on cartilage until he must reach up and snatch a handful of silken blonde. Her bite eases, only to be replaced by a hot tongue laving at the shell of his ear. Glancing down, he sees another set of claws joining the first to work on the buttons of his shirt, their pointed ends dragging over his chest as together they pull open the garment. Teeth snaps at him again, this time catching on his abdomen, and he grabs instinctively at the dark head pressing into him above his belt. And yet a hand each is not enough to slow down, let alone stop, either of them, and, unused to the attention, Will feels increasingly stifled. Stop it, he grunts, but she continues to bite at his scar as she holds on to his hips. Above, the tongue has abandoned his ear to stroke along his cheek before the scar there is also bombarded by nipping canines. Her claws dragging over his nipples. Eyes snapping shut, Will exhales raggedly under the barrage of teeth and nails. The sensation sparking a sense of familiarity the harder they bite him.
“Do you like that?” lips blow against his cheek.
“I think he does,” a voice answers for him from below, and his eyes creak open to the sight of her palming his beginning arousal through the taut fabric of his suit trousers. Red lips tugging at the corners.
“He said he would,” the blonde murmurs, and Will stiffens within their grasp.
“What?” he says, brow knitting as he stares down at her batting lashes. Gazing up at him, she soothes his reddening skin with a slow lick from her tongue.
“He said you like it rough,” she says smilingly before opening her mouth wide. With a flash of ivory, she sinks her teeth back into his scar the same time her friend gasps encouragement behind Will’s ear.
“That’s it,” she breathes, nails raking painfully down his chest. “Harder...”
Relinquishing his hold on the blonde, he sinks the fingers of both hands into cool dark tresses.
“Stop,” he grits through his teeth, grip tightening on her hair as she bites enough into his bruises to make it unbearable. From behind, the girl leans into him, and he can feel the dense globes of her bare breasts pressing into his back through the thin material of her dress. Her breath blowing hot against his ear.
“Ar skauda?” she whispers innocently enough, without the correct inflection. Without his accent. But even with the American lilt, the simple syllables stab deeper than blunt incisors, and with a low growl, he tears himself from their clasp. When the blonde steps after him, he grabs her throat with such force, it wrenches a choking sound from her lips, her eyes widening in shock as he pushes her back so hard, she loses her balance and falls with a yelp onto the floor beside her friend. He stands there with his hands at his sides, chest heaving as he watches down at them, and they stare up at him. Lips parted, lashes a flutter. The blonde massaging her neck with a hand. Will watches her turn her face towards her friend, her eyes holding his gaze as though he is a beautiful but dangerous animal.
“Is he serious…?” she murmurs, and the other chews provocatively at her bottom lip as her eyes settle on the front of his trousers.
“I think he’s playing hard to get,” she answers, head tilting. “He did say.”
“Oh yeah,” the blonde one agrees, smiling lopsidedly. But Will has heard enough. Striding towards them, he leans down to grab their wrists and haul them onto their feet before dragging them with him towards the shared door.
“Ow,” one whines whilst tottering after him.
“Skauda,” the other whimpers, and Will feels his jaw flexing as he reaches the door. Lets go of a wrist to grasp the handle.

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The door is flung open and he hears their indignant cries accompanied by the unsteady staccato of stiletto heels seeking purchase upon marble.
“That was quick,” he says without looking up from the page.
“He didn’t want to play,” one of the girls explains in a petulant voice, and he looks up to see a mixture of anger and confusion clouding those blue eyes. His chest still heaving slowly from their efforts.
He hums questioningly, feeling Will’s gaze flicker over the naked shape of him as he lies on his front on the bed, chin in one hand, the other pinning open the pages of some Arabic text that he cannot read. Folding and leaning on his arms upon the sheets, he tilts his head at the three of them. Fully aware the arching of his spine pronouncing the rise of his hips does not go unnoticed.
“Why not?” he asks, taking note of the twitching muscle in that rugged jawline. For a moment, Will does not answer, and the girls trip their way over to Hannibal, falling with sensuous sighs on either side of him. Their hands petting his naked body as Will continues to stand there, glowering. Lashes veiling his gaze, Hannibal waits. His bottom lip jutting ever so slightly.
“Ar mažasis vilkas nenori žaisti?” he purrs, watching that jaw flex a second time before blue eyes narrow and Will takes a step closer, not to bridge the distance, but in display of his displeasure.
“Nenoriu žaisti jūsų žaidimą,” he says slowly, drawing out the defiant syllables.
“Ne?” Hannibal asks blandly, blinking slow as he holds that angry gaze.
“Ne,” Will repeats lowly, like the word leaves a bad taste in the mouth.
As they were exchanging, the brunette had slowly climbed up his body, and continuing to face Will, he rolls languidly onto his back so she may card her fingers through the hairs on his chest.
“I must apologise for my friend,” he says smoothly, eyes leaving Will to observe the swell of breasts accentuated by the low-cut garment lying atop him. “He has been separated from his wife and it has been a while since he has received any female attention,” he states, laying hands on the girl’s thighs as she leans against him with her knees astride. “It makes him nervous,” he continues to explain, pushing up the tight hem of her dress and exposing the full curvature of her hips for Will to see, “but he likes it, really.”
“Maybe he likes to watch,” the girl on top of him murmurs suggestively as she rubs her body slowly against his.
“Maybe he’ll join in if he likes what he sees,” the other girl pipes up, and Hannibal feels the mattress dipping on either side of his head as she climbs onto the end of the bed.
“Do you think so?” he says, continuing to speak as though Will is not there. Tilting his head on the sheets, he lifts his eyes to see the blonde watching Will and biting her lip whilst displaying her sex for Hannibal. But the sudden sound of withdrawing footsteps tells him the man does not intend to listen or watch any further. Turning his face, he watches Will marching back to the shared door, a hand sticking out to grab the handle before tugging it to and shutting himself from their sight.
“He’s so angry,” says one of the girls.
“I like it,” the other purrs.
Hannibal smiles to himself before turning his dark gaze to the banquet of indulgent flesh held up to his very nose.

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Of course it occurs to him that it could be Hannibal’s intention for them to have a foursome, giving Will the opportunity to satisfy himself sexually with a woman, or both women, before possibly joining forces to satisfy other needs belonging to that dark mind – as well as his own, if he has guessed the other’s hopes correctly. With some irony, he recalls wanting the same that night on New Year’s Eve in Thessaloniki. Uncomfortable with Hannibal’s open teasing in the gay club, the way the other kept using the attention of others to pique his jealousy, Will had developed the notion in his head of using casual, heterosexual sex as an outlet for them both. And it was naïve to think it could

have been a means of expressing truce and friendship through the act of deriving sexual pleasure from the company of a female, as well as being incredibly selfish to envisage the encounter as two wolves sharing despite their predatory impulses in a gesture of cooperation and bonding by preying on the opposite sex.

Stood with his back to the door, Will stares fixedly at the ground as he feels himself bristling still from the girl's attempt at his Lithuanian phrases. Phrases that were not meant to be shared and passed on to strangers like a manual on dog training for new owners. And the way they had spoken of him in third person whilst he stood there, listening to Hannibal bringing up Molly to criticise his sexual prowess. Dragging a hand through his face, he sighs against his palm.

With her wine-stained lips
Yeah she's nothing but trouble

He could have acted on his anger. Ignored the fact that he would have been playing into Hannibal's hand yet again to do the terrible and ask both himself and the other afterwards, *are you happy now? Is this what you wanted?*

Cold to the touch but she's warm as a devil

Hannibal's voice returns to him from Paris: *only you know what you want to be, Will*.

I gave all my heart but she won't heal my soul
She tasted a break and I can't get more

Such generous and softly accented syllables wrapped around their razor sharp edges the man uses so freely to continually wound Will as though from his own warhead of reckoning. So he told him he doesn't want to play his game, knowing it is not entirely true. Knowing Hannibal knows it is not entirely true.

You got me in chains
You got me in chains for your love
But I wouldn't change
No I wouldn't change this love

Slowly buttoning up his shirt, he listens, determined not to be perturbed by anything escaping through the door. But it is quiet. Too quiet. He waits a moment before hesitantly facing the door and gradually turning his head to press his ear to the flat surface. Nothing. His hand slips onto the handle when he hears a muffled gasp followed by a sensuous moan. One of the girls. Exhaling through his nose, Will pushes off the door and turns away. Hurriedly unbuttoning his shirt, he tugs it off his arms and tosses it onto the bed on his way to the bathroom.

You got me in chains
You got me in chains for your love
But I wouldn't change
No I wouldn't change this love

Stood beneath the spray, he tries to think of Molly. But every time her smile begins to clarify, it melts away before rebuilding into the ruthless contours of his face. And yet there was a time when such harshness had yielded. Brow pressed to the tile, Will recalls when, feverish and weak, Hannibal had been rendered helpless to his ravages. Arms folding on the wall before him, Will closes his eyes and buries his face in them as he feels the heat of the memory lancing through him like a red hot poker.

Clenches his fists to stop himself reaching down.

Tryin'a break the chains but the chains only break me

Finished with the shower, Will steps out and grabs the towel, standing at the mirror as he dries his face and stares absently at his own reflection. His erection is still full throttle, butting against the marble wall of the sink, but he ignores it as he dries the rest of his body, tucking it into a clean pair of boxers and trying not to focus on the way it rubs against the cotton. Stepping to the bed, he lifts the duvet and climbs in, settling on his back and resting his arms on either side of him atop the cover. The room is silent. As is the one adjoining. His eyes fall on the door linking their rooms, half expecting Hannibal to slam one of the girls into it as he proceeds to have sex with her standing up just to add insult to injury. But he hears nothing for as long as he continues to lie there in the dark, listening to his own breathing. Each passing second making him feel as though the bed is stretching further away from the door, the distortion reminiscent of a horror movie where the protagonist ought to be glad he is fleeing the blood flowing through the keyhole. But horror means something different to Will now, and after a long while of deliberation, he takes a breath and tosses the cover aside before climbing out of the bed.

Alone in the night 'til she knocks on my door
Oh no

The door opens, and Hannibal is ready to accept Will's presence, just as he had the night before, when the other had come seeking comfort under the guise of his drunken stupor.

Wasted again but I can't say no
No

But those blue eyes are clear now as they find him across the room, making quick assessment of Hannibal sat in the armchair with the blonde in his arms.

Baby tell me why
Why you do
Do me wrong

"Where's the other one?" Will utters, taking a step through the door and giving the space a closer inspection with that cautious stare.
Hannibal feels her grabbing him, and reaches down to take himself in hand at the base, steadying the shaft as she leans up on her arm across his shoulders and starts to lower herself onto him.
"With Mohamed," he murmurs, and senses the other looking his way again at his distracted tone. For a moment, Will doesn't say anything, and Hannibal lifts his eyes to see him staring at the slow engulfment of his penis by the girl's anus. Her breathy moan stirs blue suddenly from their fixation, and they flicker up to glare irritably at him instead.

Baby tell me why
Why you do
Do me wrong

"He came in here?" Will demands to know, arms folding habitually across his chest. The girl has sheathed herself to his balls, and arches against him with a sigh as he hums his approval against the shell of her ear.
"Yes," he answers simply, eyes on her jawline as he moves his hand. The practised touch of his fingertips against her weak spot making her breath catch in her throat.

“When,” Will continues doggedly to ask, and Hannibal feels the girl suddenly grab his wrist.
“Stop,” she sighs, “you’ll make me come.”
“Not long after you returned to your room,” he answers, slowing his ministrations as he noses at her jaw. Noting to himself the remarkable smoothness in comparison to the rough scrape of a beard. “He swung by and saw I had my arms full, so took it upon himself to relieve me,” he explains and hears Will scoff derisively, accompanied by the impatient shifting of a foot upon marble.
“I didn’t hear him.”
“You were listening?”

Gave you my heart but you took my soul

Black meets blue as the girl begins to move, pulling herself up his length and sinking all the way back down again. The grip of her body making his eyes narrow as Will tries his best to hold his stare.
“With your ear pressed to the door?” he continues to ask, words a little broken in rhythm as she begins to move with more force, shifting to brace her back to his chest. Her arms lifting to fold behind his head as she proceeds to ride him expertly. Without answering, Will turns away for the second time that night, and Hannibal lowers his lashes at the other’s bare back.
“There’s room for one more,” he murmurs, watching Will stop and stand still as his fingers resume their careful strokes, spurring a new wave of pleasured gasps to spill appealingly from her lips.

You got me in chains
Oh babe

Will closes his eyes, listening to the obscene sound of penetration filling the air behind him. He faces the door, but doesn’t want to be alone. Frowning, he slowly opens his eyes and turns his face.

You got me in chains for your love

Meeting his gaze, Hannibal slips his hands onto the silken planes of the girl’s inner thighs so they rest on either side of her sex. Unable to look away, Will slowly turns around. And as he does, Hannibal applies a little pressure with his fingertips. Offers to the other an unobscured view of a gushing and abounding pleasure to be sought and wrought between them. Together.

But I wouldn't change
No I wouldn't change this love

He can see Will’s face turning slowly to the side as though led by some invisible and virtuous whisper. And yet his eyes are watching the point where two bodies have merged, and the remaining space is waiting to be filled. Hannibal’s devious touch makes the girl quake. The twitch in her body in turn making Will swallow as he continues to stare at the pink of his generosity. Lashes lowering as he tries to resist in mind, but not in body. Own eyes lidded, Hannibal studies the shape of him through the thin material of his underwear. A shape he has clasped and crushed with his deepest, most vulnerable parts. Appendage to Will Graham, misshapen thing that he has helped to reform and foolishly allowed to peel at the barely ripe scab and slip so treacherously inside. At least this way, the turmoil can be kept at bay by a human barrier.

You got me in chains
You got me in chains for your love

He feels himself taking a step closer. Then another. Drawn by the need to be with him, even like this. Even if he must share. Stopping in front of the armchair, he takes the wrapper offered him. Glances down as he pushes the band of his shorts over and under his arousal before tearing the foil. Rolling

the thin barrier over his length, he looks up to see her biting her bottom lip, her half-drawn gaze drowning with desire as she beckons him with her lashes. Looks across into simmering black and finds encouragement in the thought that even with a part of the man's body already in another, Hannibal cannot find satisfaction without him. Inhaling slowly, he grips himself at the root. Leans in.

But I wouldn't change
No I wouldn't change this love

He feels Will pushing in and closes his eyes at the sensation, his mouth agape to a soft intake of breath as the girl arches against his chest, her sigh of gratification escaping into the air between them. An unsteady exhale slips from his own lips as Will buries himself whole inside the girl's body, and Hannibal can feel his pulse beating hard against him through her flesh. Chest heaving together with hers, he opens his eyes to gaze through his lashes into heavy blue. Will is leaning close enough for them to feel each other's breaths on their faces, and Hannibal licks his lips, leaving them parted invitingly as his hands grope for the other's and finds them splayed against the armrests. Fingers closing tight around Will's wrists, he swallows deliberately.
"Do it," he commands lowly, and feels Will slowly withdrawing, freeing up breathing space before plunging straight back in. The resulting grip is so sudden and tight, it is almost painful, and his gasp mingles with both Will's and the girl's as the other begins to fuck them in earnest. Each piston rubbing their cocks together through her wall until he must clasp and lift her thighs enough to thrust up and meet each of Will's strokes.
"Yes!" the girl gasps amidst the slick sounds of their copulating bodies, her voice climbing an octave with each enunciation.

Tryin'a break the chains but the chains only break me

Panting hard, Will watches Hannibal as he slams his hips into her – into him. Lapping up every flutter of his lashes, every small utterance to leave his lips. Begins to develop another familiar feeling the longer they continue to stare at one another with lidded eyes and gaping mouths. The slick of her, and the grip of her body, together with Hannibal's pace and friction, is too much, and he knows he will not last long. The fevered breaths of three people are all he can hear as he continues to move in rhythm with Hannibal – the girl trapped between their undulating bodies, her own clenching down on them simultaneously as those fingers bring her closer to the edge.

"First to come kills her," Hannibal pants, and Will feels the breath catching in his already breathless throat. Then he sees the smile. "Joking," Hannibal breathes, his thrusts slowing now as he lowers his lashes at him. "Are you pretending she's your wife?" he asks, and Will feels the knot in his brow deepening.
"Don't," he grunts.
"You wouldn't share?" he asks, and Will continues to frown at him.
"That's a bit selfish," Hannibal utters, smile gone.
"She already has to share me."
"Poor Molly doesn't get to play with all her toys."
"Now who's selfish?"
"You tell me."

Black eyes narrow at him, and without warning, Hannibal suddenly regains in pace and effort. Crying out in pleasure together with the girl, Will clutches at the chair with his hands as he struggles to brace himself against his inevitable climax. Grunting as he smacks his hips up into the girl, Hannibal watches Will through the seething slits of his eyes.

“Was it your wife you saw last night?” he asks, voice devoid of emotion.
“What?”
“I’m not your wife.”

Before Will can utter his confusion, Hannibal pushes off the chair and stands. Carrying the girl who remains trapped between them, he shoves them forward until Will feels the back of his legs hitting the edge of the bed. Losing balance, he falls onto his back with the girl on top of him, his dick still lodged inside her body. Hannibal’s face appears behind her shoulder, his gaze cold as he starts to thrust. Each one faster and harder than the last. Hands clutching the girl’s thighs, Will is helpless to the other’s aggression as he lies there, taking it as much as the blonde is.

“I don’t-” he begins to pant when, for the briefest of moments, he sees Hannibal leaning over him from a different time. Nobody else between them. His lips agape as he moves up and down. And in the moonlight, Will can see his jaw is wet. A repressed groan scatters the image and he sees Hannibal’s eyes snapping shut as he feels him stiffening upon entry. The girl holds still as the other clutches her hips during his release. Then Will sees him open his eyes without looking at him. Feels him pulling out of her body.

“All yours,” Hannibal states as he delivers a sharp blow to the girl’s behind, the contact spurring her with a gasp to ride Will into the bed. Clasping her rolling hips, Will watches Hannibal walking away even whilst his own climax nears.

“I’m going to come,” the girl suddenly exclaims, her nails digging into his chest, and Will feels the warm spurts of her excitement hitting his abdomen before, breath catching, back arching against the bed, his own orgasm erupts through him. As he watches up at her euphoric expression, he tries to bring back the image from before. Brow knitting as his mind’s eye travels from that glistening jaw, up the high crest of his cheekbone. Stopping finally at those hooded eyes and the moisture wavering behind his lashes.

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

“Ar skauda?” - "Does it hurt?"
"Skauda!" - "Ow!"
“Ar mažasis vilkas nenori žaisti?” - "Does the little wolf not want to play?"
“Nenoriu žaisti jūsų žaidimą" - "I don’t want to play your game"

Lion's Den

The girl climbs off him and he lies there, staring at the ornate ceiling, catching his breath. From the bathroom, he can hear the shower coming on and slowly sits up. Wrapping his hand around himself, he peels off the used rubber and gazes absently at it with mild self-disdain before tying a knot into its end and tossing it towards the bin. It lands on the edge and hangs there limply like a dirty symbol of how deflated he currently feels post coitus. Standing up, he tucks himself back into his underwear and paces towards the sound of falling water.

Hannibal is stood in the shower, his face held beneath the spray as he runs a hand through his hair. The girl is working up a frothy lather in his chest hair with her fingers. Sensing Will's presence at the doorway, Hannibal wipes the water from his face which he turns towards him before opening his eyes.
"Are you coming in?" he asks, own hands rubbing down his chest as those claws chase the slipping suds towards his pubic hair. Folding his arms, Will leans against the doorframe.
"What are we going to do with them?" he asks instead, watching the girl fondling Hannibal's tackle.
"We have names, you know."
He lifts his eyes to see her glancing at him with an arched eyebrow.
"He's ever so rude," says Hannibal as he puts his hands on the girl's hips and turns her around. She reaches back to gather her blonde mane aside so he can start rubbing the shower gel over her shoulders and down the sleek line of her back.
"Assuming he brings the other one back," Will continues to voice his query, the sight of the other palming and squeezing that voluptuous backside making him wonder if Hannibal is considering what dish he would fashion out of such sumptuous globes of flesh.
"I believe he was making up numbers," says Hannibal.
"For what?" Will scoffs. "An orgy?"
"Probably," Hannibal answers idly.
Will snorts derisively as he glances aside.
"I'm surprised he didn't try to stay," he mutters under his breath.
"This man sounds like a lot of fun," says the girl, and Will can't help childishly rolling his eyes.
"Yeah. About as much fun as having a red hot poker shoved up your arse."
"Maybe if you relaxed, you would enjoy it."
Turning his face towards the playful voice, Will regards Hannibal flatly, eyes closing halfway.
"We'll take a drive once everyone is here and you've freshened up," Hannibal explains before blinking innocently at Will. "Sure you don't want to come in?"
Holding the other's inviting gaze, he speculates on Hannibal's suggestion of driving the girls back into the city. Perhaps the man has something in mind. But maybe Will has, too. Shifting his feet as he continues to lean against the doorframe with his arms folded, Will lifts his narrowing eyes to the ceiling.
"Maybe she *could* go to him…" he muses aloud. *With a red hot poker*.
"Our ladies are exceptional albeit expensive prostitutes," states Hannibal. "They are not hired assassins."
Glancing from the corners of his eyes, Will meets that dismissive black gaze. *What's the matter? Don't like the idea of someone stealing your kill?*
"For the right price, I can be whatever the fuck you want," the girl purrs, and Will lofts his brows at Hannibal.
"See?" he says, watching the other finish rinsing himself off and step out of the shower. "I'd give a limb just to see him shit his Versace pants."
Grabbing a towel, Hannibal wraps it loosely around his hips as he approaches Will at the threshold.
"I'm jealous," he murmurs, lashes low as he gives Will an appreciative onceover before meeting him

in the eye. “I always thought you hated me the most,” he adds, lips quirking wryly at the corners as he walks past. “And I already have dibs on the whole hog.”
Will parts his lips to retort, but Hannibal beats him to it.
“You do such a good impression after all with your perpetual grunting and snorting.”
“Yeah. Well. You sure fooled me with those crocodile tears,” he says, a touch too quickly, and Hannibal hesitates. Will waits for the comeback, but there isn’t one as he watches the Verger brand continue on its way.

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They get dressed in silence, Will giving the girl a hand with the zipper on her dress. Past her light tresses, he watches Hannibal pull on his suit jacket and glance over as though aware of being watched. Their eyes meet for a brief moment before he turns to the mirror on the wall to check his hair. As the girl steps away, Will runs a hand through his own curls, suddenly wishing they were alone so he can ask the other what’s on his mind for this drive back into the city – if that’s really where they are going. And maybe about the night before, even if he senses a reluctance from the man to go over the specifics. Which only makes Will wonder the more what he’d done wrong.
“Do you still have the keys?” Hannibal asks, and in answer, Will sticks his hand into his trouser pocket to fish them out.
“Are we off?” he asks, looking over his shoulder to see Hannibal offering the girl his arm.
“Lead the way,” Hannibal answers, and Will can’t help but start reading into all the possible meanings behind those words when he opens the door and sees Mohamed, the other girl, and a couple of his burly wingmen stood behind with their hands clasped in front of them.
“Perfect timing,” says the Egyptian smilingly. Will eyes the gaudy black and gold paisley of the man’s bath robe. Measures the other’s trim physique through the clinging silk. “If you would be so kind as to return the ladies to the city, Mr Graham,” he says with a glance at the keys in Will’s hand before lifting his dark eyes to meet blue. “There is something I need to discuss with our friend.”
“I can wait,” says Will coolly, holding the other’s gaze as the man takes a step closer.
“There’s no need,” says Mohamed insistently, and Will flexes his jaw at the infuriating passive aggressive tone of his voice.
“A word,” he utters, stepping back to take Hannibal by the arm before steering him loose of the blonde and retreating together into the room. Shoving the door shut, he leads Hannibal a further few steps away before letting go of his arm.
“I don’t trust him,” he states under his breath, arms folding.
“You don’t have to trust him,” says Hannibal. “Just me.”
Will meets that calm look and shakes his head.
“He’ll probably call the cops while I’m on the road,” he hisses distrustfully. “An American with a couple of prostitutes?”
“You’ll find they’re more lenient towards foreigners.”
“What does he want to discuss?” Will continues to ask, ignoring Hannibal’s observation. “Not what you fancy for breakfast, that’s for sure.”
“How do you know?” asks Hannibal, humouring him, and Will scowls.
“Did you not see tweedle dee and tweedle dum back there?” he says, head jerking impatiently towards the door. “You’d be carried off and thrown somewhere like a piece of fucking furniture.”
“Will.”
Exhaling inwardly, he watches the floor.
“I wouldn’t have walked us into the lion’s den if I knew something untoward could happen to either of us,” explains Hannibal, quiet and even of tone. “Trust me.”
Blinking slow, Will shakes his head again.
“I know it may be difficult for you,” says Hannibal, “but you still owe me.”
Will looks up at that nostalgic smile and sighs, running a hand irritably through his hair before resting both resignedly on his hips.

“If I knew you were going to hold it against me for the rest of our lives, I wouldn’t have thrown us over,” he utters.
“Poor Will,” says Hannibal, taking his chin with his fingers. Not expecting the gesture, Will knits his brow at the touch as he meets unreadable black. “You should’ve made sure we never surfaced.”
Swallowing, Will frowns.
“You wouldn’t have allowed it…”
“Maybe not.”
He feels something stroking lightly over the scar on his cheek before Hannibal removes his hand and faces the door as he straightens his suit jacket. Watching the other’s back, Will is in half a mind to grab his arm and drag him to the nearest window. He still has the keys to the cabriolet. They could get a head start on Mohamed and his entourage. But it’s too late. Hannibal has opened the door and Will can see their host watching them with his eyebrows lofted expectantly.

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The mansion is strangely silent post festivities. Perhaps he had simply lost track of time, but it’s as though guests, musicians and performers alike have vanished like the fading of a narcotic inspired vision. Once more, he finds himself seated on the majlis in the sunken centre of the room, observing the young newly-wed sat across from him and wrapping his lips around the mouthpiece of his hookah. Sucking greedily at the shisha vapour, Mohamed reclines against the plush upholstery with his arms resting along the top of the furniture on either side of him. Parts his lips and blows a heavy flurry of tobacco smoke into the air between them. His eyes half drawn as he watches Hannibal.
“I’ve been asking Mr Hussain to come up with a flavour of shisha you’d enjoy,” he says.
“You know I prefer not to,” replies Hannibal amiably as the other returns the silver piece to his mouth and makes a thoughtful sound before drawing. Releasing it, he tilts his head and exhales through the nose.
“What if the flavour was Will Graham?” he asks, brows lofting.
“Then your whole room would smell of dog,” Hannibal answers with a perfunctory glance around them. The man opposite him chuckles, and he returns his gaze to that curious stare.
“Is that his favourite position?” Mohamed asks with a smirk, and Hannibal smiles politely in return.
“How was your wedding night?” he asks instead.
“Fantastic.”
“Your wife was not jealous to be sharing you with two other women?”
“She wasn’t there.”
“Ah.”
“If I gave her the right dosage, she shouldn’t open her eyes again until the morning.”
“Naughty boy.”
Mohamed hums thoughtfully, his eyes narrowing.
“Tell me. What’s it like to drive a man to madness?” he suddenly asks, and Hannibal watches him levelly, awaiting elaboration. “I don’t mean using physical torture or threats,” he adds, brow knitting.
“But the thing you do, my friend…”
“What is it that you think I do?” asks Hannibal mildly.
“I’ve been watching him since Thessaloniki,” says Mohamed. “And I’ve never seen a man so haunted by his relationship with someone, let alone another man.”
Hannibal remains quiet as the other slowly sits up and leans his elbows on his open knees. Silver point of the mouthpiece tracing the shape of his lips thoughtfully.
“Such unparalleled obsession with you,” he murmurs lowly. “I want to know how it feels.”
Holding that dark gaze, Hannibal pretends to consider the other’s proposition.
“Only he would know, I’m afraid,” he says.
“I see.”
He looks up to see Mohamed smiling at him.
“And have you got what you need?” his host asks.

“Almost.”
“Almost,” Mohamed echoes, lips atwitch at the corners. “Might I suggest you answer more definitively next time, my dear friend. Even the most patient monk will reconsider his generosity in the face of an unrelenting god.”
Hannibal pauses to express his consideration of the other’s advice.
“Perhaps he shouldn’t be a monk,” he retorts civilly with a blink. The Egyptian lowers his dark lashes as he leans back against the majlis. Knees parting just enough to display his naked manhood beneath the silk robe.
“Sometimes I wish I was a cannibal so I would not hesitate to eat that smart mouth of yours,” he murmurs.
“That’s assuming I let you.”
“And that’s assuming I need permission.”
Mohamed holds his gaze a moment longer before returning his attention to his hookah and leaving Hannibal to reflect on his words.

Bait

Chapter Notes

> First part of the chapter is intended to be read to the song 'Wolves' by Selena Gomez. A lyric only cover version can be found: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IFjiT9RnSA

In your eyes, there's a heavy blue
One to love and one to lose
Sweet divide, a heavy truth
Water or wine, don't make me choose

Sat in the armchair in his room, Hannibal watches the night beyond the floor length windows. With both a sudden urgency and reluctance, he wishes for the company of Bedelia. Because he feels he may have made a miscalculation, and whilst he loathes to admit a mistake, it could do him some good to hear her view on all this. His surprise at Mohamed's suggestion, yes. His surprise at himself and the disturbing weakness flowing through his veins like a vital but alien drug. It is easy to romanticise the concept of love. He did, initially. Then he accepted it for what it was – a twisting, pulling and pushing that draws its fuel from an underlying hurt and distrust which proves difficult to rectify despite all the promising signs. And yet, he cannot be without it. This restless hankering for reconciliation. Hesitant to wish too strongly for it lest he is met with disappointment again, he prefers to take what he can get. To live in the moment and spend the days tormenting one another because, like a couple of brawling animals, he feels alive, happily subjecting himself to the other's cruelty so no thoughts echo in his mind palace save the scent of him, and the sound of his breathing. Like the night on the bluff. Despite the fact that it was precisely this intoxication that had caught him off guard. Lowering his hand from his face, he leans his head back against the upholstery.

I wanna feel the way that we did that summer night
Drunk on a feeling, alone with the stars in the sky

There is a knock on the shared door before it opens.
"Have you come to ask for permission?" he asks without taking his eyes off the desert.
"How did you know it was me?"
"He never knocks," Hannibal replies, looking over at Mohamed as he leans against the doorframe. His dark eyes glinting with moonlight and something else.
"How rude of him."

I've been running through the jungle
I've been running with the wolves
To get to you, to get to you
I've been down the darkest alleys
Saw the dark side of the moon
To get to you, to get to you

He hasn't been stopped by police yet, but nothing will take this edge off until he's back at the mansion. And even then, *he* is still there. With Hannibal. If the latter considers himself a snake

charmer, then Will is the mongoose ready to strike when the former proves too much of a handful. Hannibal may refer to his Egyptian friend as a lion, but Will has yet to see evidence of a noble character beyond his powerful yet dubious status and connections. Being alone in the cabriolet after dropping off the girls only accentuates the urge of picking up Hannibal and driving off into the hostile terrain. Better to take their chances with Mother Nature – again – than with a man whose intentions Will finds more difficult to read than that of Hannibal's.

I've looked for love in every stranger
Took too much to ease the anger
All for you, yeah, all for you
I've been running through the jungle
I've been crying with the wolves
To get to you, to get to you

"I apologise for resorting to an underhand form of negotiation," states Mohamed casually, "but I am disappointed by your refusal to grant me such a simple request." Lashes lowering, he tilts his head and adds, "you of all people should understand the need to satisfy a curiosity." Hannibal holds that dark gaze.
"You mean to change my mind," he says, and the other smiles charmingly as he pushes off the doorframe and folds his arms.
"And you mean to tell me only Will Graham is capable of that, correct?" says Mohamed as he paces across the room towards him. He stops by the chair and unfolds his arms to take Hannibal's chin in his fingers.

Your fingertips trace my skin
To places I have never been
Blindly I am following
Break down these walls and come on in

"I will turn him over to the authorities together with Jack Crawford's body," he explains. Keeping his eyes on the gaudy pattern of the other's bath robe, Hannibal lids his eyes nonchalantly.
"You believe that would be enough to change my mind," he says.
"I am fairly certain that you value that man's wellbeing more than your own," answers Mohamed with some disdain. Hannibal holds still as the other leans down to speak into his ear. "You may pretend that is not the case," he murmurs lowly, "but I can smell the stink of weakness. From that moment I walked in on you in that hotel room. Lying there feverish and drenched in your own sweat. I thought to myself, this is not the man I once knew."
His hand darts instinctively, closing hard around the other's throat. Mohamed smiles triumphantly, unperturbed by his grip. Resting his hands on the armrests on either side of Hannibal, he leans into it. "Have you forgotten?" he utters against his fingers. "Shall I remind you?"

I wanna feel the way that we did that summer night
Drunk on a feeling, alone with the stars in the sky

"What is this supposed to prove?" Hannibal asks, feeling the hard pulsation in the younger man's neck as he maintains the pressure. An innocent blink from those large eyes.
"I just want to know how he will respond," he says, smile deepening, and Hannibal feels his grip relenting a fraction. "Like you, I wish to know what kind of man Will Graham is, to see what it is that lives inside his skin. But unlike you, I have no qualms with doing whatever it takes to bring it out."
He feels the pad of a thumb pushing against his lips and grazing itself against the sharp edge of his teeth. "Maybe if you take off those rose tinted glasses, you will see what I see, my friend," says Mohamed, voice clear in the quiet of the room since Hannibal has ceased pressing on his windpipe.

With the freedom to move, he presses his lips to the shell of Hannibal's ear. "We live in a world of cruelty uncompromised," the voice purrs. "He is but a dog having rolled in the aftermath of the hunt. He does not belong amongst the beasts of blood."

I've been running through the jungle
I've been running with the wolves
To get to you, to get to you
I've been down the darkest alleys
Saw the dark side of the moon
To get to you, to get to you

Stepping back into the mansion, he is greeted by a couple of Mohamed's men who will not let him pass until he has handed over the keys to the cabriolet. Shoving his hand into his trouser pocket, Will pulls out the keys and tosses them at the one stood to the left. Both are tall and of heavy enough build to make life difficult.
"Where is your boss?" he asks, refusing to be intimidated.
"Your gracious host has retired for the evening," one of them answers impassively, and Will smiles tightly to stop himself scoffing openly in their faces.
"Yeah," he utters under his breath as he shoulders past them, half expecting both pairs of burly arms to grab his suit jacket on passing. But they don't, and he hurries in the direction of their rooms, shoes clacking on marble. *Sure he has*.

I've looked for love in every stranger
Took too much to ease the anger
All for you, yeah, all for you
I've been running through the jungle
I've been crying with the wolves
To get to you, to get to you

Half expecting the door to Hannibal's room to be locked, Will opens it with more force than necessary and stops himself mid-step. Hannibal is sat against the headboard in his boxers, his hands behind his back. Chin lifted, but eyes downcast.
"I'm glad you are back," says a voice, drawing his eyes to the man sat in the chair pulled alongside the bed. Still wearing his bath robe, Mohamed is slouched in the furniture with lazy contemplation of the sight before him. A quick glance around confirms he is here alone, and Will reaches behind him for the piece tucked into his belt.
"Wait," says Mohamed, holding up a hand. "You do not know yet what this is about," he continues to say, turning his face to regard Will with a frown. "Don't draw my own fucking gun on me."
"I'll draw it if there is reason to draw it," Will utters, hand on the handle of the pistol.
"And I'm telling you there is not," snaps the other irritably. "Do you think my men let you keep that so you can threaten me in my own home?"
"There is more than one way to use a gun," Will answers darkly, and Mohamed scoffs, waving dismissively in his direction.
"The gun *works*," he says slowly, with emphasis, as though Will is simple. "Seriously. You guys have some trust issues."
Will glances at Hannibal who continues to gaze indifferently at the space in front of him. The angle of his arms suggest his hands are held captive behind his back.
"What is this about," he demands to know.
"Okay," says Mohamed, standing up languidly from the chair and pulling taut the sash around his waist, "let's cut the bullshit as you Americans say." Chin lifting, brown meets blue across the room. "I want to fuck him, but he says no," he states simply. "So I said maybe he'll change his mind if you agree. After all, it would seem you have developed a taste for sharing."

He feels his face scrunching up before he can control it and, witnessing his discomfort, Mohamed smirks. The sight of which fills Will with the urge to sink his knuckles into the other's face like he had done Randall Tier's, followed by the possibility of murdering the man having agreed to his repugnant request. He needs to know if Hannibal is thinking the same, but the other is behaving as though they aren't even in the room discussing him like some powerless sex slave. As his anger grows, so does the dark appeal of Hannibal being helpless and compromised.
Stop it.
"Am I supposed to interpret your silence as consideration?" Mohamed asks amusedly, eyes giving Will a onceover as he starts to pace towards him with his hands in the pockets of his bath robe. Watching him slowly approach, Will tightens his grip on the handle of the pistol, but refuses to step back. "Of course, I would be the one taking," Mohamed adds, matter-of-fact. "I mean, it's less likely he will bite your cock off, knowing how fond he is of it." He stops in front of Will. Then takes one step closer, breaching personal space to get right up into his face. "So how about it, Mr Graham," he murmurs, lips still tugging at the corners. "You going to fight me for him?"
"Don't you have a wife to get back to," Will utters as he holds that dark stare.
"As do you," Mohamed chuckles, "so what's your point?" He lids his eyes confidently before adding, "You know I have the means to remove you."
"But do you know if they will arrive on time?" Will retorts.
Tilting his head in thought, Mohamed studies a point past Will's head as he itches idly at his perfectly groomed beard.
"If not on the dot…" he starts to muse aloud before suddenly pulling his other hand from its pocket. "They'll arrive for the pieces."

He draws his gun, but Mohamed is faster. Whilst he barely had chance to look at the weapon, he can most definitely feel the sharp point of it digging into his throat whilst a hand presses over his and the pistol.
"My gun, please," says Mohamed amiably. Teeth clenching, Will starts to take a step back, but the grip of the other's hand keeps him from leaving his range. Pushing down on the weapon before Will can fire it in his direction, Mohamed steps close and jabs the spearhead protruding from between his knuckles into the top of Will's thigh, its razor sharp edges sinking through his flesh like butter. Biting back a cry of pain, he tries to shove the other back to free himself and create space to fire the gun, but before he has snatched half a breath, the arrowhead is out – then back in. This time into the hand clutching the firearm. Growling through his teeth, Will shoves his free hand into the other's face as he pushes tremblingly against Mohamed's knife. Trying, despite the searing pain, to lift the muzzle. Then he feels a thumb shoving into his thigh and grunts, fingers digging into cheek and beard the same time the digit gouges at the wound. Ignoring it, he continues to try and lift the gun and is rewarded by a twisting of the spearhead. Growling louder as he drops the pistol, he hears it being hastily kicked away as the knife pulls out, and he catches Mohamed's fist with the pointed spearhead just before it goes for his abdomen. He feels teeth sinking into the fingers clawing at the man's face, but continues to push against him, surprised by the strength in the other's deceptively trim frame.

Hand shaking and dripping with blood, Will begins slowly to force that fist back as he glares defiantly at his adversary. The knee to his groin is unexpected. So unexpected that Will doubles over instantly with a groan but grabs at the hand snaring into his curls and dragging him down onto his knees. The sharp point under his jaw is supposed to curb his resistance, and yet it's not until it's cutting into him does Will finally hold still, breathing heavily, angrily, through the nose. He tries to look towards Hannibal, but his view is blocked by black and gold.
"You know," says Mohamed, a little breathlessly. "I know exactly where to cut a man so all he can do is watch." Will tugs doggedly against the grip in his hair and grunts as he feels the point of the spearhead jabbing further into his neck. "But I'll make it easy for you," he says genially, "go back to your room like a good boy while daddy has some fun."

“I’m not going anywhere,” Will snarls. The fingers tighten cruelly in his hair, making him grimace.
“I could give you an alternative, but you may not find it pleasing to your palate,” says Mohamed, tilting his head as he watches down at Will. “Although, you never can tell with you Americans.”
“Mohamed.”
Reading defeat in the expressionless sound of Hannibal’s voice, Will swallows against the first nauseous wave of trepidation.
“Return him to his room,” he says, and once more, Will wishes he could look over and try to read what’s going through the other’s mind – if he really means to just give in to this psychopath.
“Daddy says you’ve to go to bed now,” says Mohamed with a pout as he slowly tugs to and fro on Will’s hair. Jaw flexing, Will closes his eyes and opens them again to glare up at that mocking expression.
“What’s the alternative,” he grits through his teeth. He hears Hannibal call his name warningly, but the Egyptian keeps his attention on Will. Face breaking once more into a charming smile.
“Now I wonder if you will leap at this opportunity like an excited dog,” he begins to chuckle and Will snaps his eyes shut again to resist the urge to launch himself at the other.
“Just say it,” he hisses.
“Alright,” says Mohamed. “I want you to fuck yourself on him as I watch.”

Will frowns at those lofted eyebrows.
“Do you need me to say that again?” he asks.
“…you’re insane,” Will spits the words.
“Insane is Dr Lecter’s Grecian sensibilities,” corrects Mohamed, “and his refusal to fuck you because to do so would be an affront to your precious masculinity.”
The man’s smile vanishes. “And yet he will subject himself to such humiliation,” Mohamed continues to say contemptuously. “A great man debasing himself because he will do anything to make you stay.”
Hawking, he spits on Will, and he closes his eyes as he feels the phlegm hitting his face.
“I’ll do it,” he says without second thought, lifting his good hand to wipe the glob from his cheek.
Because it’s nothing compared to what I have in store for you. What both of us will have.
“You’ve made your point.”
Will opens his eyes at the sound of Hannibal’s voice. He has not heard such raw and vicious defensiveness in a long time. It makes him hate the situation with added vehemence. “Must I now be presented as a piece of meat to be fought over?”
“Then how about served?” says Mohamed placatingly. “Mr Graham seems ready to have you. Unless you don’t want him.”
“He has no say in this,” Will snaps, glaring at the floor. “Let’s just get this over and done with.”
“Then what are you waiting for?”
He lifts his eyes at the question.
“Take off your clothes.”

Sustabdyk

Chapter Summary

Second half of the chapter is intended to be read to the song 'Heartbeat' by Justs. A lyric only version can be found: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gddt0vbyZSI

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chin lifted, Will discards his suit jacket as he holds that dark gaze. Under its self-satisfied scrutiny, he then proceeds to strip himself aggressively of his shirt, allowing to flicker through his mind the thought of strangling the younger man with his belt as he tugs impatiently against the buckle. But the other has sat back down in his chair. Legs crossed with the pistol lying cocked and locked atop his thigh. That insufferable grin on his face. Turning his glare askance, Will stalks in his boxers to Hannibal's side of the bed, eyes downcast as he reaches the edge and plants a knee upon the cover. His left thigh is smeared with blood from rubbing against his trousers, and continues to ooze slowly when he brings it up and over. Leaning on his knees astride Hannibal's legs, he sits down with an exhale through the nose. Left hand holding his right to stop it dripping.
"He's making a mess," states Hannibal, and Will lifts his eyes at the wooden voice to see the other eyeing the rivulets he can feel making their way down to expensive material.
"He will be," says the voice casually from behind.
Jaw flexing, Will grabs the waistband of the underwear in front of him, the backs of his knuckles grazing warm skin. Tugs down on the garment whilst gathering saliva against his tongue. His mouth feels dry, however, and the spit landing on the other is scant.
"Pussy," snickers Mohamed.
Realising the other is able to read apprehension in his frown, Will scowls while moving closer to Hannibal, not quite able to meet him in the eye as he grabs him with his bloody hand and fumbles to push aside his own boxers.
"No cheating, Mr Graham."
"Fuck you."
"If you prefer."
Drawing a deep breath through his nose, he presses his lips together at the casual threat and glares at the ceiling as he sits back to tug off his underwear before getting back onto his knees. As he takes Hannibal in hand once more, he finds the slick having all but evaporated, and the moisture all but gone from his mouth.
"Fuck it," he utters through his teeth before clenching his fingers tight around that shaft and pushing it between his cheeks. *It's nothing*. He finds his anus and holds Hannibal in place. *Just do it*. Pushing down, he tries not to think about just how difficult it is to work against one of the strongest muscles in the body. And yet, despite the unnatural sensation of penetration, Will finds a certain grounding – comfort is not the right word – in Hannibal's incapacitation. Even whilst he struggles to shove a penis into his rectum, Will channels his pain by grabbing the throat before him. Since he'd started forcing himself on the man, those hooded eyes had snapped shut against what was happening, but what is suffering if it is not shared between the both of them.
"Pažvelk į mane," he grunts under his breath, watching those black eyes slip open beneath the burn of his stare, witness to his pinched face and the tight line of his lips as he pushes himself down to the hilt with a flaring of his nostrils.

“You make an excellent homosexual whore, Mr Graham.”
Will ignores the gloating voice and starts to pull up the shaft rubbing him raw when he feels Hannibal swallowing against his grip on his throat and sees him glancing sharply aside. His brow fraught with affliction.
“Sustabdyk,” he hisses, and that dark entity inside Will recoils suddenly at the syllables as though whipped. It has not yet learned to defy the crippling effects of rejection, and Will swallows convulsively as he frowns, fingers clenching indignantly on that neck as he feels his face growing heated with embarrassment.
“Enough,” says Mohamed suddenly, and Will closes his eyes, feeling ready to take a bullet on his way to the Egyptian.
“I can’t watch any more,” says the man disgustedly, and Will hears him tutting as his bare feet start padding away. “You are like scarab trying to climb the Khufu pyramid. Is hideous.”
The door opens and closes, and in the relative silence of the room, their breathing is uncomfortably loud.
“Did that bastard just call me a dung beetle,” Will grunts, letting go of Hannibal’s throat to grab the headboard.
“It will be less uncomfortable if you wait for it to go down.”
At those quiet words of advice, he feels a furrowing in his brow again. The part of him that thrives on the other’s pain considers the prospect of finishing this. To hear the man beg him in Lithuanian to stop. Driven, when begging turns into growling, to force his ejaculation with the sheer, unbridled aggression of his own body. And to reward his submission by marking that reluctant expression with his own angry release. But that part of him hasn’t recovered in time, so instead he busies himself by reaching behind Hannibal.
“You need to find some new friends,” he utters, filling the air between them with words as he stares at the wall and fumbles to free the cable tie cinched tight around the other’s wrists.
“I apologise for his behaviour.”
The regretful tone of his voice beckons like a food laden hand to his inner beast, but Will ignores it to focus on pushing his nail into the plastic slot.
“He can do that himself while I’m skinning him alive,” he says, and feels an excited pulsation in his rectum, which he ignores. “At least now you’ll let me kill him,” he adds as he successfully gets his nail in and starts sliding free the plastic.
“That was always the case.”
“Just not yet,” Will scoffs quietly, glancing aside.
Bringing his wrists in front of him, Hannibal rubs at where the plastic has bitten into skin, his eyes downcast. Will exhales through his nose, closing his hand around the strip of plastic and grabbing the headboard once more.
“Are you soft yet?” he asks with a knitted brow, feeling as awkward as when he hadn’t been able to get it up with – but he stops himself before he thinks of her.
“Almost.”
He is about to pull himself off regardless when the other speaks again.
“How is your hand.”
Putting down the cable tie, he slowly opens and closes his fingers. Against the pain of having his anus forced open without lubrication, the knife wound, whilst being somewhat deep, is bearable in comparison. And thankfully hasn’t affected his movement too seriously.
“Still working,” he says and holds still when Hannibal reaches to take his hand in his own. Without saying anything, he examines it. His touch slow and careful.

Inevitably, he is reminded of the time the man had bandaged him up. These days, he barely knows what it is to be gentle, but the memory resurfaces with unbidden strength, like it happened only yesterday, and Will wishes he would stop fixating on it. Like he is fixating now, on the way those eyes continue to stare at his hand as the other’s chin lowers to bring his lips to his knuckles. Licking his own, Will swallows.

“What are you doing?” he utters lowly and presses his lips together when he sees that mouth open and a tongue slipping out to lave slowly at the dried tracks of blood. Entranced, he watches on frowningly without moving until he feels Hannibal probing at the raw edges of the wound, and tries to focus on the discomfort of his anus to curb his beginning arousal. And yet, lips parting, the word stop doesn’t quite make its way out as he feels the moist tip tracing then reaching just a touch too deep into the gash. Snatching air through his nose, Will pulls his hand away and, with a grunt of pain, pulls himself off the other’s lap.

Without warning, Hannibal lunges forward, pushing him onto his back. Landing with a grunt, he grabs his head with both hands, fingers snatching lacquered tresses as the tongue returns to clean the blood from his thigh.
“What are you,” he begins to half-protest when he feels the wet muscle pushing into the mouth of his wound, testing its depth. Biting back a curse, Will arches uncomfortably whilst his dick continues to harden. Then he feels a hand grab his bicep before he’s pushed over onto his stomach.
“Hey,” he utters warningly, chin lifting against the cover as he tries to look back over his shoulder. Catches those hooded eyes staring down in concentration as hands take hold of his buttocks. “Hey,” he tries again, and immediately drops his face to the bed with a curse and suppressed groan as he feels fingers pulling on the globes of his arse to spread them open. “Fuck,” he mumbles into the cover as he feels the warm puff of his breath against his stinging hole. “What are you,” he tries again, the words catching in his throat when he feels the pad of a thumb rubbing gently against him.
“You have an anal fissure,” says Hannibal quietly.
“I could’ve told you that,” Will grumbles into the cover.
“Perhaps two.”
“And the rest.”
He feels the other pulling away and, grabbing a handful of the cover against his arousal, slowly rolls over to see Hannibal standing up whilst tucking himself back into his underwear and making his way to the bathroom. His shaft, Will notes, still very much turgid. Grimacing as he sits up, Will runs a hand through his hair. Weariness is starting to kick in, and he is ready to tell the other they can leave off killing their host until tomorrow if he reckons the man won’t try to murder them first in their sleep. *Surely he’s done for the night, amusing himself by upsetting Hannibal. Like anyone would want to do that. Joke’s on him, the smug bastard*. And yet, he did manage to upset the man. And Will doesn’t like that. Hand resting on his nape, he thinks about what Mohamed had said.
“So,” he begins to say, loud enough for the other to hear from the bathroom. “You’re not my wife and I’m not your,” he continues to say then pauses as he racks his memory for the correct term.
“Eromenos,” he adds once he has remembered. *The adolescent male courted by an older man in Grecian society.*
No response from the bathroom.
“Not that I’m some pubescent toy boy,” Will scoffs to himself before a memory comes suddenly to mind. Licking his lips, he pauses. *Now’s as good a time as any. Or rather, it will never be a good time.*
“Were you crying the other night?”

Hannibal walks out of the bathroom with a first aid kit. Kneeling at the bedside, he puts the kit down on its side upon the cover and opens it up before reaching for a roll of bandaging. Will shifts to sit carefully beside him on the edge of the bed, giving the other his hand when he gestures for it. *Not going to answer, huh.*
“Mohamed takes good care of his knives,” says Hannibal, studying the wound once more. “But if you prefer, we can rinse it with saline.”
Considering you’ve had your tongue in it.
“I’m sure it’s fine,” Will utters, looking down at the gaping mouth himself. “If you think it’s fine.”
Neither says anything as Will watches Hannibal bandage up his hand. Hooded eyes downcast. Licking his lips, Will tries again.
“You didn’t answer my question,” he says, pausing a moment before adding, “did I-”

“You couldn’t-”
“Hurt me if you tried,” Will interrupts, turning his face with an impatient sigh, “I know.”

I know you told so many times
So many words in different rhymes
But I don't feel the same

“But I don’t remember,” he starts to add with a frown.
“Then what does it matter.”

I wasn't innocent I know
And things I did for sure were wrong
The time has passed so long

Will had meant to take the roll of bandaging. Instead, he finds himself taking hold of Hannibal’s hand, stopping him. Shaking his head the once, he licks his lips again, head tilting now as he struggles to comprehend what the other had just said. His mouth hangs agape for a moment longer in deliberation of the words. Then he remembers to inhale and they tumble out in a sudden rush.
“It matters.”

Feeling your heartbeat
That's what I want
That's what I need
Feeling again that you're breathing with me

Hooded eyes fixate on his arousal. Will is still holding Hannibal’s hand.
“Is it true what he said?” he asks, voice quiet and low.
“Stop talking,” Hannibal murmurs.

I'm getting wild when I'm alone
I learned by heart you're not my own
But I never asked you to belong

Pushing off his hand, Hannibal picks up the scissors. Snips the bandage and ties it off. Then Will feels the other pressing his own hand onto his erection. Brow knitted, he lifts his gaze to the collarbones before him.
“It makes no difference to me, whether or not we...” *Sometimes I wonder if it would be easier for the both of us now if I hadn’t responded the way I had in that restroom in Thessaloniki. If we had remained painfully platonic.*
“You should have left us, then,” says Hannibal simply, letting go of Will’s hand to clasp the closed ends of the scissors lying on the cover between Will’s knees. Watching his hand, Will moves his own down to clasp it, fingers closing over warm digits and cold steel.
“I’m not going anywhere,” he utters.

Feeling your heartbeat
That's what I want
That's what I need
Feeling again that you're breathing with me

Hannibal looks up with a troubled expression, and for a moment, Will is sure the other means to stab him with the scissors. But he doesn’t move when that hand snatches back from his grasp, taking the scissors with it. He holds that black gaze until he hears the clatter of steel upon marble and feels the hard dig of fingers at the tops of his thighs – the wound in the one still aching in its untended state.

Gasping, he grabs fistfuls of hair as Hannibal lowers his head and swallows him down to the balls. The flat of his tongue mapping the underside of his shaft as his throat relaxes to let him in.

Feeling your heartbeat
That's what I want
That's what I need
Feeling again that you're breathing with me

“Fuck,” Will pants as he falls onto his back and closes his eyes with a hurried lick of his lips. “Fuck,” he groans again as Hannibal swallows and swallows at his head, throat muscles milking him of pre-cum and squeezing the full length of him with the relentless suction of his mouth. He was hard to begin with, and now, lifting his head enough to watch the hollowing of his cheeks, the sharpening of those cheekbones – the lowering of lashes obscuring that fervent gaze – all he wants is to come. And the next obscenity to spill from his lips coincides with the abrupt thickening of his cock, the vein stark sides of his shaft straining against Hannibal’s teeth before it pumps repeatedly into that greedily swallowing throat.

You're the one that I need
You're the air that I breathe

When that mouth finally releases him, Will pushes up on his elbows, chest heaving. He sees Hannibal pressing the back of his hand to his lips as he starts to get up off his knees. Sitting up, he grabs the other’s wrist and pulls the man down before rolling them over. Hand bracing against the bed, Hannibal refuses to be pushed back and remains sat as he frowns up at him while Will does the same looking down.

Don't throw my heart away
I want you to stay

As he starts to lean in, he is stopped by a hand on his throat. Swallowing against the grip, Will holds that lidded gaze as he pushes his hand into the underwear beneath him.
“Let me return the favour,” he utters, still a little breathless.
“It’s not clean,” says Hannibal.
“I don’t care.”
“I do.”

Hannibal drops his gaze and Will pulls him out of his boxers before spitting generously into his hand. Then, pushing against the grip on his throat, he presses his brow to the other’s as he snatches his cock and begins hurriedly to stroke.

Feeling your heartbeat
That's what I want
That's what I need
Feeling again that you're breathing with me

The room fills with the sound of his shallow panting. Face turned to the side, he can feel Will’s breath on his cheek as the man doggedly presses his brow into his temple. Pushing back, he leans harder against Will. Feels an arm wrapping around his neck and lets himself be dragged down onto the bed with a grunt. Staring at the ceiling, he reaches for his curls. Grips onto the forearm keeping him in a headlock as Will brings him closer to the edge. Their legs brushing upon the cover.

Feeling your heartbeat
That's what I want
That's what I need
Feeling again that you're breathing with me

It comes back to him, even as he nears his release. The realisation that Will had tried to kill them. The stark relief of him changing his mind. The seemingly endless circle. Exhaling raggedly, he squeezes shut his eyes as liquid heat spills down his cheeks. Feels a hand clasping the back of his head before his face is pushed against the other's chest. That fist continuing to force his release. When he finally comes, the crashing wave of relief breaks the chain of their legacy, and though he despises the loss of composure, he is slow to gather the pieces. Instead, he keeps his eyes closed against Will's chest and makes the most of the breathing space created before the chain is reforged.

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

"Pažvelk į mane" - "Look at me"
"Sustabdyk" - "Stop it"

Devil's Advocate

Lying there on the bed, he cannot help noticing how alien it feels to be comforting the other. The molecules forged anew in him from the fire of Hannibal's furnace were not built for this. Still, the old empathy has not dried up in his veins.

And though he doesn't fully comprehend the man's tears, he understands theirs has never been an easygoing relationship. That much is agreed upon by all parties, from Bedelia's suggestion that he is willingly following Hannibal into hell, to Jack's plea for him to wake up and escape the other's dark influence. And now they have Mohamed's claim that Hannibal is becoming a lesser version of himself because of Will. As infuriating as it is to be taunted by the Egyptian, the man has nevertheless raised questions regarding the nature of their relationship.

With a frown, he thinks back to what Mohamed had said about Hannibal's Grecian sensibilities, and grows uncomfortable with the feeling of being put on a pedestal.

How could he have known when so much of their history was built on perpetual one-upmanship. When Hannibal had seemed more intent than ever on throwing challenges at him since they regrouped in Thessaloniki, exuding the air of a mentor waiting contemptuously upon a mentee who keeps falling short of his onerous standards and expectations.

And yet, it was in the restroom of the club in Thessaloniki that Will found out he had apparently forced Hannibal to, following the murder of Richard, *eat his cock*. He had dismissed it at the time. Shoved this disturbing fact aside. Buried the suggestion that beyond whatever concoction had been administered to remove his inhibitions, the desire was organic. Confused, probably, but there all the same. Without it, Hannibal's manipulation would not have gone as far as it had done.

He could blame it on sexual frustration. Bloodlust. A toxic combination exasperated by Hannibal's pharmaceutical knowledge. He could blame the other for taking advantage of his confused state. Nobody would even argue his right to be angry. Hannibal just happened to be on the receiving end. He had taken everything without complaint, eyes wet with pain. Will doesn't know what to do with genuine tears, or the suggestion that he has somehow made the man *lesser*.

The sensation of Hannibal pushing against him brings him out of his thoughts. Busy contemplating, he hadn't noticed the flaccid member slipping from his hand before being tucked away. As Hannibal sits up, Will watches the back of his tousled head. The mussed tresses making him look oddly vulnerable. And suddenly he wants to go. Leave this place now associated with the other's humiliation at the hands of what had been a trusted friend, even if it pains Will to have to acknowledge this in the bastard.

Hannibal disappears into the bathroom and not long after, he hears the sound of the shower coming on. Sitting up, he imagines the other lifting his face into the spray and letting it sluice him clean of salt until all traces of weakness have slipped down the drain. He needs to clean up too - his right hand feels tacky with semen.

Getting up, he finds and pulls on his shorts before gathering the rest of his clothes, noting his missing firearm and wondering where Hannibal has kept his gun. Pacing to the shared door, he glances back over his shoulder at the open doorway of the bathroom. Faces the front again and hears something on the other side of the door.

Pressing his ear to its surface, he hears a muffled sound of crying and slowly opens the door. On his bed, beneath the covers, something small is quivering. The main door is ajar. He walks over to close it fully before approaching the bed. Putting down his clothes, he takes hold of the cover and lifts it up to reveal haphazard black curls and large staring eyes.
“Kosey?” he utters quietly, gaze falling on the tiny hands besmeared with blood. Catching one, he leans down for a closer look despite the child’s squirming. No cuts. Checks the other one and finds it unscathed.
“Where is Mariah?” he asks. When he lets go, the boy grabs the cover and pulls it down, shutting himself from view.

Standing, he moves back to the main door. Locks it before entering Hannibal’s room. Pacing to the first bedside table, he opens it. Nothing. Walks round to the other one. Opens it. Takes out the pistol. Checks it on his way to the bathroom. Cutting through the steam, he taps on the glass and Hannibal turns off the spray. His eyes falling on the gun through the fogged glass.
“Stay here,” says Will under his breath. “Lock the door.”
Without waiting for a response, he exits the bathroom and heads to the main door. Opening it, he slips out cautiously into the hallway, unsure of which direction to take until he spots a smear of red on the wall.

Heading in the direction he presumes the child to have ventured from, Will wonders where Mohamed’s men are. The whole floor is absent of guards and silent except from the sound of the bare soles of his feet slapping across marble. Having rounded the corner and travelled down a good length of the next corridor, he hears something. Lifting his arms, he follows the sound with the pistol poised. The closer he gets, the clearer the noise grows until he recognises the sound of someone struggling to breathe.

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The boy curls up into a ball when he recognises the person lifting the cover. Standing there with a towel wrapped around his waist and the ends of his hair dripping water, Hannibal pries insistently at the tight knot of limbs until he is satisfied there are no wounds. Covering the child back up, he returns to his room and goes over to the phone. Picking up the receiver, he dials the number for Mohamed’s room. No answer. Dials instead the number for the room he knows the dancer to be staying in. Mohamed picks up instantly. Breathes an irritated *busy* before hanging up. Replacing the receiver, he moves to pick up the scissors lying on the floor by the bed.

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The door opens as he approaches, and he sees Hannibal dressed and wielding the scissors in his right hand. Hooded eyes look down at his own hands as he pushes inside while the other closes the door behind him. As he stalks his way to the bathroom, he hears Hannibal following after.
“Whose blood is that?” he asks.
“The nanny’s,” Will answers lowly, setting the gun down by the sink and turning on the tap. “Her throat’s been cut,” he continues to say as he washes the blood from the pistol. “She said something before she died,” he adds, looking up at the other standing at the threshold. “Salma.”
Hannibal hums.
“I rang the guest room. He was occupied.”
“He doesn’t know about this?” says Will dubiously.
“I don’t believe so.”
“You said she’s the jealous type,” says Will, picking up the gun and walking past Hannibal back into the bedroom. An outfit lies waiting on the bed.
“Did you know she’d be jealous enough to kill?” he asks as he hurriedly gets dressed.

“It’s not necessary to presume death to be the inevitable outcome of jealousy.”
Will turns his face to regard the other flatly as he shoves his shirt into his trousers.
“Did you know or didn’t you,” he says, fastening his belt as he watches Hannibal pick up the pistol to check it over.
“I know her to be capable of acts of cruelty,” he answers. “One could be inclined to say it was a matter of time.”
“Explain.”
“She went to extraordinary lengths to convince Mohamed he is not the father,” says Hannibal plainly. “To build an apathy to the boy’s wellbeing until she finally took her sister’s place.”
“She’s the boy’s aunt?” says Will in disbelief. Hannibal lofts his invisible brows at him. Pausing with his hands on his hips, Will exhales.
“I know I said I’m not going anywhere,” he says lowly, “but can we please get the fuck out of here?”
“Only because you said please,” says Hannibal, the scathing sarcasm in his voice making Will press his lips together. “What do you wish to do with the child,” he asks, eyes turning to the shared door.
Will follows his gaze with a frown.
“That’s his problem,” he utters quietly after a moment, facing the front and ignoring the other’s scrutiny. “Who told him to marry his crazy sister-in-law.”
“And you have no qualms whatsoever about leaving the boy in the same house as said crazy sister-in-law turned wife.”
“Why are you playing the devil’s advocate?” says Will, shooting a look at the other.
“I don’t want you to feel as though you must resort to cruelty simply because you are surrounded by it,” says Hannibal simply. Brow knitting, he folds his arms and watches that mild expression.
“You’re telling me nobody would care if the boy is murdered in his own home,” he says.
“It would be considered unfortunate,” says Hannibal.
A pause as Will slowly grinds his teeth.
“Goddamnit,” he finally exhales. “If I knew better, I’d say you’re trying to coerce me into doing something charitable,” he scoffs.
“It is not coercion if you were always going to do it,” corrects Hannibal as he offers Will the pistol. “Whilst you could not save yourself, it remains in your nature to try and save others.”
Will watches Hannibal a moment longer before taking the gun. Watches the other begin walking towards the shared door.
“Where are you going?”
“To get the child.”
“Shouldn’t I do it?”
“Will you gag and restrain him?” Hannibal asks, stopping to look back at him.
“Is that necessary?” says Will, unconvinced.
“Not everyone understands what it is to be saved,” he says, facing the door. “For some, it’s practically indistinguishable from punishment.”
“Does it feel like a punishment,” says Will suddenly, watching the back of his head. “Being with me.”
“Yes,” he answers immediately, head tilting. “Isn’t that the point?”
He is ready to say it’s not the only point when the other opens the door and walks through into the room.

Proposition

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Between them, they take out security on the ground floor of the mansion. It was not their intention to murder these men per say, but neither did Will hold back when he'd floored and caught one of them in the crook of his arm. The same one he had gotten himself into a scrap with. And, fuelled by the returning frustration at the memory of Jack, he proceeded to strangle the man in his arms whilst Hannibal ambushed his partner and opened his arteries with the scissors. Watching that calm countenance from the corner of his eyes, Will could read something of Hannibal's own frustrations as he dropped the limp body onto marble before moving into position for approaching reinforcement. He watched, with his hands raised under the poised guns of the new men, as Hannibal slipped from the shadows. His position given away in the dim by arcs of blood and the sound of choked gurgling. It seemed to Will that the other was intent on leaving their host with as much mess as possible.

Plucking the keys from the guard's pocket, Will waits for Hannibal to fetch the child he'd left gagged and restrained on the bottom of the stairs before making their exit via the main doors. He checks and pushes a pistol past the edge of Hannibal's suit jacket and into the band of his trousers as they hurry down the steps. On his way to the cabriolet, he notices Hannibal moving out of his periphery, and turns his head to see the other stopping by the driver's door of the GT coupe. Shifting the child from one arm to the other, the man shoves his hand into his trouser pocket. Looks up as Will comes towards him. Snatching the keys as they are pulled free, he nudges Hannibal out of the way with his shoulder.
"You insisted bringing him," he scoffs, pulling open the door. "He can sit on your lap," he adds, lifting his eyes from the immaculate interior and across the low roof of the vehicle to Hannibal's mildly peeved expression.
"Very well," he says, and Will slides himself down onto the spotless leather of the bucket seat, its contoured form holding him like a bracing hand. When Hannibal is in the car with Kosey, Will runs a hand through his curls and grasps the wheel one-handed.
"Seatbelt," he says, smirking despite himself.
"Don't let it get to your head."
Will glances askance to see Hannibal sat with the infant in his lap, the seatbelt being drawn over the both of them before slipping into the buckle with a secure click. Hooded eyes meet his amused gaze, the feigned nonchalance within their depths doing nothing to mask the indignant displeasure all too familiar to Will. Brows lofting coolly, Will turns his eyes back on the drive exit.
"Too late for that."

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Cubic in shape and minimal in external decoration, the Hussain residence feigns modesty against the purpling backdrop of the sky with its white walls and simple driveway in comparison to Mohamed's ostentatious home. But whereas the latter's mansion is a hefty testament to the Egyptian's arrogant love of showmanship, this building is a façade for residents who enjoy theatrical presentation equally as much, albeit on a different platform. Inside its square walls, Will knows, lives a man of unconventional taste, and a woman who appears to delight in flouting conventional norms. More people Will cannot trust, the further they travel into this alien world of privilege and the unspoken elitism of an underground realm reserved for special guests only.

He has just parked up on the drive, and is already considering reversing straight back out of it, if not

for the infeasibility of driving off into the desert – a notion that keeps crossing his mind each time he finds himself behind the wheel of a high performance automobile.
“Can’t we just leave the kid on their doorstep?” he utters, turning his eyes on the child who has fallen asleep against Hannibal’s shoulder. In another life, such a sight could be considered normal. Domestically humdrum, even. But in the current one, it can be nothing but unnerving, reminding Will of the time the other had decided to pay a visit to the Vergers. And before that, the hand the man had played in the dire fate of his own unborn child with Margot. The cruelty of which still haunts Will to this day, to this very moment as Hannibal sits beside him with an abducted child in his arms. Glancing up from those dark curls, he sees black eyes regarding him with understanding, and stares instead at the villa ahead.
“We shall be leaving Dubai,” says Hannibal. “As soon as I have what I came for.”
“You think he’ll be safe here?” Will utters.
“You have doubts?”
“You told me once that you know of those who eat children for pleasure,” replies Will flatly.
“Daniyal is not one of them.”
Will grunts noncommittally.
“Either way, the child cannot come with us.”
“Like I’d wish that upon him,” says Will, running his hand irritably through his hair. “You really think the police would just return him?”
“Most likely.”
“Even if…”
“By now, he is likely to have been on the phone to those who will come and make everything go away, if they haven’t already.”
“Worth a try.”
“Whilst he’s still alive, he remains a threat to us.”
“Now that you’re no longer friends,” Will scoffs, despising the inconvenience of not having Mohamed on side.

As they remain in the car, a glass door on the first storey slides open and a figure dressed in a bathrobe steps out onto the balcony above the garage. Pacing to the railing, she holds onto it with a hand whilst using the other to keep the dark wave of her hair from blowing into her face.
“Speaking of friends,” says Hannibal as Will watches the recognition surfacing on Alima’s face before she turns to hurry back inside.
“Now is not the time for a foursome,” Will utters.
“It’s not?”
At the playful sound of Hannibal’s voice, Will turns his face. And at the wooden look on Will’s face, Hannibal tilts his head with affected consideration, his eyes on the Hussain residence.
“I can settle for questioning,” he says lightly.
“Damn straight you will,” says Will. “Now get out the car.”

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If Daniyal Hussain was not pleased to have Will and Hannibal turn up on his doorstep with the abducted son of an important man, he was polite enough not to have projected this outwardly. Having greeted them at the door, he led them through to the living room where his wife took the child from Hannibal before they were asked to take a seat and kindly explain what had brought them to call upon their residence at so unexpected an hour.

So Will told them about Mariah, and Hannibal explained their host’s part – or lack of – in the situation using language which suggested enough without being vulgar. Although Will himself would have used different words to describe a man who is so busy fucking other women on his wedding night that he doesn’t even notice his wife murdering his nanny under the same roof. It was a big roof, sure, but

that was beside the point. Neither of them mentioned the guards, but it was clear from the shrewd glances the couple gave one another that they were not about to let their guard down around their guests. After exchanging some words with her husband in Arabic, Alima left the room with Kosey, and Will saw her looking his way once more before disappearing. Turned his eyes to Hannibal sat in the armchair beside his own to find the other watching him with lofted brows as though to say *I saw that*.

"It was never a good match," their new host mutters to himself as he re-enters the living room carrying a small tray containing a decanter and three tumblers. Setting it down on the glass coffee table, he adjusts the belt of his robe before lowering himself onto the settee across from them and reaching for the bottle.
"But she has gone too far this time," he says, pulling free the stopper and slowly pouring a modest measure of amber into each glass.
"We apologise for involving you in the boy's welfare," says Hannibal.
"Rather this than the boy lying in his own pool of blood, I suppose," Daniyal murmurs as he continues to pour. "It is not so great an inconvenience to us. There is no need for apologies," he adds generously before putting down the decanter and picking up a glass. Leaning across the table, he holds it out to Will who moves forward to receive it. Those dark eyes studying him without the barrier of spectacles.
"So tell me what it is you are really here for," he says as he offers Hannibal the next tumbler. As Will had expected, the man is no fool, and did not believe for a second that their visit had been driven by mere compassion for a boy unrelated to them by blood.
"I wish to finish our conversation," answers Hannibal plainly, lifting the glass towards his lips. "After which we'll be on our way."
Having swallowed a mouthful of his whisky, their host leans back against the settee with an exhale, the languid crossing of his legs reminding Will of a suspect making a show of his fearlessness in the face of his interrogators.
"So," he murmurs, lidded eyes moving from Hannibal to Will. "Where were we?"

The curtains have been left undrawn across the floor length window forming most of the third wall, and through the huge pane of glass, there is a view of the pool and, beyond it, a garden table with matching chairs sitting beneath a wooden gazebo. On either side stand palm trees, their fronds shifting in the strengthening light. Back in the space of the living room, Will watches the glow of daylight begin to illuminate the contours of Daniyal's face as Hannibal reminds the man of their previous conversation. Symmetrical and balanced, his features would be considered by most to be pleasant to look at, but when the light creeps into his gaze, Will can see, as much as that cool demeanour seeks to distract the undiscerning eye, the sharpening of yet another calculating edge. Hannibal has just asked a question regarding access to the underground establishment which they suspect the brothers to be a part of.
"Your very name ought to suffice," says the man as he studies the dwindling contents of his tumbler. "They got in touch not long after we returned from the wedding."
Will feels his brow knitting and glances askance at Hannibal who continues to regard their host with feigned indifference as they wait for an elaboration.
"It seems they had a run in with a man by the name of Jack Crawford."
At the sound of his name, Will meets those dark eyes.
"Realised you were on your way to Dubai," he continues to say, attention returning to Hannibal. "I suppose they deemed it plausible for one notorious individual to be in touch with an esteemed patron sharing the same inclinations." He tips the remaining slither of amber past his lips. "They asked if you were at the wedding. I told them you were."
"Was that all?" asks Hannibal, and Daniyal takes his time leaning forward to pick up the decanter and pour another measure into his glass. Taking a sip, he lifts his eyes to Will.

“They felt your work was artistically compromised,” he says, holding Will’s gaze a beat longer before looking at Hannibal.
“How rude,” Will utters, and Daniyal hums absently, his eyes on the coffee table.
“I am aware you wish to meet with them as much as they wish to meet with you,” he eventually says, sitting back against the settee with a crease of concern between his eyebrows. “And you are no doubt aware of the need for certain rules and laws of etiquette to be followed if one is to gain access to membership,” he continues say, directing his words at Hannibal.
“Are you worried we will crash your little cannibal party?” says Will, ignoring the bristling energy radiating from the armchair beside him even as he lofts his brows and holds Daniyal’s half-drawn stare.
“What Mr Graham means to say,” Hannibal pipes up smoothly as Will and their host continue to measure one another with their eyes, “is that we hold the utmost regard for rules and etiquette.”
“Naturally,” the man utters, continuing to watch Will without blinking. To show the other he is not intimidated, Will lifts his glass and sips slowly. Also without blinking.
“As with any establishment, such laws must be mutually respected,” Hannibal continues to say evenly. “It would not therefore be considered unreasonable if a man were to react should others fail to respect the code. Indeed, they should know they would only be bringing the roof upon their heads.”
Daniyal breaks eye contact with Will to glance at Hannibal.
“Have I made a mistake allowing you under my roof, Dr Lecter,” he murmurs.
“It is not our intention to shoot the messenger,” says Hannibal. “Neither are we intent on rocking the boat, so to speak. Yet I’m afraid we cannot vouch for whatever may happen should we choose to accept this invitation, and therefore I offer my apologies in advance should your experience of the establishment suffer unexpected delays.”
“Unexpected delays,” Daniyal snorts quietly. “You do have a way with words, Dr Lecter. Unlike your friend.”

As the man deliberates, Will finishes his whisky, the glass masking the curling of his lips when he glances askance to see Hannibal regarding him with disapproval in those hooded eyes. *I’m sorry. Did I rock the boat and disturb the veil of pretentious bullshit?* Hannibal returns his attention to their host as though to say *you know you did*. Or, *will you behave yourself*. And instantly something stirs within him at the show of displeasure. A sharp stab of desire to cause further aggravation beneath that illusion of indifference. Good job his legs are crossed, Will notes to himself. It would undermine their authoritative stance somewhat, springing an erection in the middle of a negotiation.

“I suppose one is always aware of the risks,” Daniyal eventually sighs, standing up from the settee and readjusting the belt of his dressing gown as he looks out the window. “It is, after all, not from the study of birds or the collecting of stamps that we derive our pleasure,” he continues to utter. “One moment, please.”

As the man leaves the room, Will uncrosses his legs and sits forward to reach for the pistol pressing against his lower back. Pulling it free, he gives it a quick check before pushing it back into his belt.
“Did you acquire an extra firearm, or is the attempt at sabotage exciting enough these days,” scoffs Hannibal quietly.
“Good cop, bad cop,” says Will nonchalantly.
“You may wish to reconsider your posture before our host returns.”
“What’s wrong with my posture?” says Will, watching that black gaze dropping to his lap and knowing fine well what the complaint is.
“Your manspread reveals all.”
“...so?”
Hannibal gazes blandly past his head.
“The impetuousness of privileged company appears to have rubbed off on you somewhat.”
“Well, now that you mention,” says Will, pretending to shift uncomfortably in his chair. “Something’s

definitely rubbing."
"Tu esi neįmanoma," Hannibal utters before lifting the tumbler to his lips.
"Tau tai patinka," Will utters back.

A pause as he watches the other finish his drink. And then:
"But in all seriousness," he begins to say, aware of Hannibal watching him as the smile fades from his lips.
"Do not take to heart what was clearly said to provoke," says the other before he can finish. Will doesn't say anything in response. Just watches the coffee table until the sound of Daniyal re-entering the room makes him look up to see the man, now wearing his glasses, approach Hannibal with something in his hands. The latter stands to receive the business card held out to him.
"How soon do you plan to grace them with your presence?" Daniyal asks.
"As soon as the next available flight," Hannibal answers, eyes on the card. "Assuming we make it."
"In the GTR? Of course you will," the man scoffs. "I have already taken the liberty of looking on your behalf." He slips his hands into the pockets of his dressing gown. "In just under five hours, there will be a flight which will get you into Tokyo Haneda airport. There are guest rooms on this floor if you wish to stay."
"I was inclined to believe we had outstayed our welcome," says Hannibal, and the other exhales sharply through his nose.
"What's another four hours or so before the wolves are released," Daniyal murmurs. "I would prefer to have you around, still, should the boy's father come knocking. I also took the liberty of calling just now, but he appears to be occupied."
"I have a cell phone on my person. Should he call, I shall let you know."
"Much obliged."
Heaving a sigh, their host tilts his head at Hannibal.
"Please refrain from making waves," he says quietly. "You are about to delve into the heart of something very dear to me."
Will bites his tongue to stop himself saying something derogatory. Instead, as Hannibal makes his response, he turns his face to watch the blue water of the swimming pool rippling beneath the morning sky.

Once their host has bid them good evening despite the growing brightness of the room, and left them on their own, Will slowly stands up, his hands coming to rest habitually on his hips.
"Tokyo, huh," he utters, eyes on what lies beyond the window.
"It would appear so."
Turning his face, Will sees Hannibal gazing thoughtfully at the sky.
"We could pay Mohamed one last visit before leaving," he murmurs quietly.
"How likely is it that he has already alerted the authorities?" Will asks.
"It's hard to say," answers Hannibal. "Depends on the situation with his wife and mistress."
Will turns his eyes back on the pool.
"It may bring you satisfaction," Hannibal says in a hushed voice beside him, "seeing him one last time."
"There is no pleasure to be had from killing pathetic creatures," Will utters derisively.
"None at all?"
"I'll let you keep your little Egyptian friend as long as he continues to pull strings for us."
Hannibal hums.
"If not, I'll just have to string him up myself."
"In what manner?"
"Wouldn't you like to know."
Feeling eyes on him, Will turns his face. Meets that half-drawn gaze and swallows despite himself at the returning stab. Hannibal continues to study him, and when he speaks again, his voice is soft with invitation.

“Perhaps we should try to get some sleep,” he murmurs, and Will feels his lips parting when the memory of the man weeping in his arms makes him abandon whatever response was ready to leave his tongue. Holding that gaze, Will licks his lips and folds his arms.
“I’m thinking it might do some good if we returned to how things were,” he forces himself to say without pausing. Black eyes continue to watch him, giving nothing away.
“When were you thinking?”
“I don’t know,” Will utters, glancing aside, “before the fall, maybe.”
“Have you been on the hookah without me knowing?”
At the coolness of his tone, Will continues to watch the doorway.
“I don’t smoke.”
“Tobacco, maybe.”
He recalls them sharing a joint in the hotel bath whilst they were in Thessaloniki. The surprising softness of those cruel lips.
“Is it not somewhat redundant, searching the dregs of the past for a remedy?”
“We skipped the learning from history part,” Will answers, slowly bringing his eyes back to the other’s chest.
“Hm.”
“And remedy implies illness.”
“Do you consider yourself ill?”
At the question, Will lifts his eyes to meet Hannibal’s guarded stare. His lowered lashes veiling those familiar dark depths.
“I consider myself free from encephalitis,” he says drolly, feeling a small flurry of relief at the sight of the other’s subtle smile. “Either way,” he continues to say in a quiet yet serious voice. Sincere. “I’m not going anywhere. I just…think it might be better…”
There is a pause as Hannibal appears to be waiting for Will to finish his sentence with a tilt to his head. When he doesn’t, that hooded gaze returns to a fixed point beyond the window.
“I suppose I ought to be glad you didn’t drive us off a cliff,” he murmurs amusedly, turning to face the doorway. “I’ll be in the guest room if you need me,” he says, and Will watches him go with arms slowly unfolding. Just before he crosses the threshold, he stops and turns his face to the side. Will watches him blink and part his lips. Hesitating for a moment longer before facing the front and continuing on his way. Exhaling, Will unclenches his hands and runs one into his hair. With the dreaded mention of abstinence out the way, the full weight of Daniyal’s words return to sit heavy on his mind. *They felt your work was artistically compromised*. To which, Hannibal had told Will not to take to heart such words of provocation. Despite the fact that so much of their time together had felt like nothing but. He wants to take the decanter with him to his room, but refrains from doing so, knowing full well he’d only end up contradicting his own proposition. No. He needs to lie down, he tells himself, and fall into oblivion before he starts to dwell on thoughts of Hannibal. Of the man lying alone in the room next door.

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

“Tu esi neįmanoma” - You are impossible
“Tau tai patinka” - You like it

Devil In Your Ear

Chapter Notes

> Car journey intended to be read to the song 'Super Bass' by Nicki Minaj. A lyric only version can be found: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbB4PP4HknU

Having removed his clothes, Will realised they had not finished tending to all his stab wounds before they left the mansion. The injuries had not been inflicted upon with him with serious intentions to incapacitate. Just enough to make Will acquiesce. And in the heat of the moment, occupied as they were with taking down Mohamed's men, neither had paid much attention to his thigh. It wasn't too bad, to be fair. The blood that had oozed and stained his suit trousers was not glaringly obvious against the dark material, and the cut itself had stopped bleeding, he noticed, upon peeling back the garment. For appearances sake, he supposed he could have rinsed it in the bathroom. Just to avoid drawing attention. But exhaustion was catching up with him, so he climbed instead into the guest bed.

A presence stirs him from the dark and dreamless depths. *Not Hannibal*. Instinctively, he reaches, half awake, for the pistol beneath the pillow. Rolls over onto his back and feels a hand catching his wrist. A slither of early morning light slices the dim of the room from a gap in the curtains. It reveals the figure sitting just out of its reach upon the bed beside him. *Alima*. Through the weak strip of illumination, he sees the long dark wave of her hair. Is invited to a glimpse of the silken chemise clinging to her slender frame past the edges of her open bathrobe. Lifting his half-drawn eyes to that dark gaze, Will opens his mouth, only to close it again at the sight of her raising a finger to her lips. He lets her push down slowly on his hand, lowering the pistol to the cover. Does not move when she leans in.
"Hell hath no fury like the underestimated," she whispers into his ear, hand letting go of his wrist to splay against his bare chest. She leans back to watch him through the heavy veil of her lashes. Her face held close enough for him to feel the warm stroke of her syllables against his lips. "Music has charms to soothe a savage breast." Will lowers his eyes to watch her hand slipping down his abdomen.
"You mean to play me like an instrument," he murmurs, recalling the stage of the concert hall and the cello man sat upon it. *I believe he wants to show someone how well he plays*. He thinks of hooded eyes as he feels the softness of lips upon his and the hand moving further down his body.

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This one is for the boys with the booming system
Top down, AC with the cooling system
When he come up in the club, he be blazin' up
Got stacks on deck like he savin' up

Will watches the road stretching out into the distance before them, the desert surrounding them on either side with endless planes of shifting sand. In the horizon, the sun sits upon the crest of a rising slope like a yellow ball emanating heat in the orange blue gradient of the sky. It is an alien environment he looks forward to leaving, this vast and empty land with a city at its centre that glitters like a trophy to the privileged. He can sit in their rooftop bars, in their elitist nightclubs. Drive their

fancy cars. But for all its decadent distractions, he hasn't felt at ease for a single moment. And he suspects the next chapter of their travels will only aggravate the growing unease of his displacement, even though he is losing sense of what home even is the more time he spends journeying with Hannibal.

And he ill, he real, he might got a deal
He pop bottles and he got the right kind of bill
He cold, he dope, he might sell coke
He always in the air, but he never fly coach

"How did you sleep?" asks Hannibal as he lowers the volume of the radio. Will glances askance at the immaculately combed hair and neatly arranged shirt collar, but despite the tidy appearance, there are faint shadows beneath those hooded eyes. He turns his own back on the road.
"Alright," he answers, wondering if the other had heard anything from the other side of the wall.
"And you?"
"I've had better."
Will hums and listens to the voice of the female artist.
"How are your wounds?" Hannibal asks.
"Fine," says Will, looking down at his right hand. The bandage looks clean enough, still.
"I assume the other has not caused you any trouble," says Hannibal mildly. "Although I doubt it would have hindered your lovemaking if you had managed to tackle Mohamed's men with it well enough."

He a motherfucking trip, trip, sailor of the ship, ship
When he make it drip, drip kiss him on the lip, lip
That's the kind of dude I was lookin' for
And yes you'll get slapped if you're lookin' hoe

Will inhales inwardly and leans his arm upon the passenger window.
"It was fine," he mutters.
"Just fine?" Hannibal asks, voice light.
"My leg was fine."
Hannibal hums thoughtfully and Will turns his face to look out the passenger window.
"I didn't finish," he states.
"Really?"

I said, excuse me, you're a hell of a guy
I mean my, my, my, my you're like pelican fly
I mean, you're so shy and I'm loving your tie
You're like slicker than the guy with the thing on his eye, oh

He turns his head just enough to watch the other from the corners. Finds dark eyes half drawn with indifference. Sharp lips set in a casual line when they had hung open to his heated pants behind Will's eyelids.

Yes I did, yes I did
Somebody please tell him who the F I is
I am Nicki Minaj, I mack them dudes up
Back coupes up, and chuck the deuce up

When, upon Alima's leave, he had lain there with his hand wrapped around himself and returned to that night upon the cliff edge. And instead of throwing them over, he lies on his back as Hannibal

rides him into the ground beside Dolarhyde's cooling body. Bleeding freely from his bullet wound as his engorged cock bops heavily with each wanton thrust impaling him onto Will's dick. Grunting in pain as he watches down at Will with that same look of helpless intoxication.

Boy, you got my heartbeat runnin' away
Beating like a drum and it's coming your way

And he can feel the change forced upon Hannibal - not by Dolarhyde, nor the hands of anyone except his own – and rolls them over. Feels himself growing into something monstrous as he claims the one thing that has tormented him all this time. Hurting the man. Crushing him. Destroying all his defences. Watching as those black eyes glaze over with an agonised and transcendental euphoria. His willing sacrifice. His living, breathing, aching design. His Prometheus chained to the rock.

Can't you hear that
Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass?
You got that super bass
Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass
Yeah, that's the super bass

"If you had managed successfully to impregnate Alima, I would have had the perfect name for your child," says Hannibal amusedly.
"Oh yeah?" Will scoffs quietly, turning his eyes back on the road. "What."
"Hanbal."
Will scoffs again.
"It means purity in Arabic," Hannibal explains.
"Assuming it would be born unscathed."
"Would it not?"
Will leans his head into his hand, eyes lidding. For a moment, he doesn't say anything and Hannibal continues to drive.
"I finished to the thought of fucking you as a monster," he eventually murmurs.
"Ah."
A pause.

Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass
He got that super bass
Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass
He got that super bass

"Perhaps you like the idea of me bearing you a monster child."
"If you did, it would most likely eat its way out," Will murmurs.
"You speak of it as though it would not bring you pleasure," says Hannibal amusedly.
"There is no pleasure to be gained from losing your mate," states Will.
"Ever the man of sentiment."
"Says the man who cried."
"I see you are intent on holding that against me."
"I've learnt it is unwise to attend your dinner parties unarmed."
"Do you not trust me to give you a steak knife, Will."
"I don't need a steak knife to eat what you're serving."
The words left him easily, naturally, without thinking, and there is the tiniest pause as Hannibal considers his choice of words, their first night at Mohamed's flickering through both of their minds. Will recalls coming to Hannibal and how his heart had been fit to burst with fear.
"That assumes the entrée is-"

“Small,” Will interrupts.
“Compact,” corrects Hannibal.
“Slack,” Will utters nonchalantly, allowing a further pause before adding, “On the presentation front.” He recalls the sight of Hannibal lying on his stomach in the faint moonlight creeping in past the curtains as Will took a cheek in each hand to spread the man open before burying his anxiety with the taste and texture of him. So taut and tantalising.

He glances askance to see Hannibal watching the road with lofted brows. His head tilted. His lips parted. Will looks away, unable to stop the tugging at the corner of his mouth.
“I daresay you have mistaken my dish with someone else’s,” Hannibal finally says, and Will is ready to retort when a ringing starts suddenly from the speakers, heralding a call. Hannibal accepts it and Mohamed’s voice joins them in the car.

“Good morning my friend,” it greets them jovially. Will says nothing as Hannibal returns the formality. “I see my wife has put such a scare into you that you felt the need to flee my home,” Mohamed continues to say. “Although not before leaving some of my men in…various states of disarray.” Will exchanges looks with Hannibal who does not immediately offer an apology. “I recall giving specific orders to avoid confrontation should you choose to take your leave, but I assume they panicked somewhat upon witnessing the abduction of my son.” At the sound of his chuckle, Will folds his arms. “I admit I was too preoccupied to really notice. But how is the lovely Mr Graham? Can he sit down yet or is he in need of one of those hernia donuts?” Jaw flexing, Will remains silent as Hannibal changes the topic.
“Kosey is safe,” he explains. “He is with the Hussains.”
Mohamed scoffs through the speakers.
“Because it reassures me to hear my lamb has been delivered safely into the hands of the butcher,” the man drawls.
“We felt there had been enough lambs to the slaughter for one evening,” says Hannibal, and the other chuckles lowly. Teasingly.
“Am I speaking to the renowned Dr Lecter?”
“Yes.”
His tone is mild and indifferent, and when Will glances over, so is the expression on Hannibal’s face. And yet he can sense a slight bristling in the air. Wants the man to get to the fucking point.
“It is rather unfortunate. Mariah wasn’t too bad a nanny,” says their ex-host with a heavy and languid sigh, bringing to the forefront of Will’s mind that gaudy designer bathrobe wrapped around his trim yet deceptively strong frame. With crystal clear clarity, he imagines ambushing the other in one of his ostentatiously decorated rooms and choking him with the sash of his own bathrobe. “But, you know how it is,” Mohamed continues to say breezily. “Survival of the fittest and all that. Was probably for the best you took the boy.”
“If they have any sense, they won’t return him,” Will mutters under his breath.
“Ah, Mr Graham,” cries Mohamed amiably. “How nice to know you prefer to see my son being turned into a human kebab.”
“Your wife had the idea first.”
“Doesn’t your wife cook, Mr Graham? Though I suppose you haven’t been home in a while to sample it.”
Will can imagine the smirk on the Egyptian’s lips and parts his own.
“We wish to thank you for the invite and your hospitality,” says Hannibal smoothly, glancing at Will who presses his lips together as he looks out the window.
“And I thank you for coming,” replies Mohamed. “I trust you have what you need to continue on the next leg of your journey.” His last words an accented lilt of suggestion that gets under Will’s skin like a wrongly inserted needle.
“I hope so,” answers Hannibal, and Will returns his attention to those hooded eyes. Watches them

lidding at the road as the man pauses and understands Hannibal is waiting for affirmation. He turns his face again to glare out of the passenger window. *I'll let you keep your little Egyptian friend as long as he continues to pull strings for us.*
"You know so," corrects Mohamed lowly.
"I remain indebted to your generosity," says Hannibal.
"And I, yours."
Will shoots an exasperated look in Hannibal's direction. *What is this, the fucking boy scouts?*
"Perhaps we can catch up when I have returned from my honeymoon," Mohamed continues to say.
Will lofts his brows at Hannibal's unperturbed expression. *If he returns.*
"May you have a marvellous time with your wife," says Hannibal.
"We hope she murders you in your sleep," adds Will. As laughter erupts through the speakers, he jabs the touchscreen, ending the call. The voice of the artist returns, still singing her song.

See I need you in my life for me to stay
No, no, no, no, no, I know you'll stay
No, no, no, no, no, don't go away

Arms still folded, Will leans back in his seat.

Boy, you got my heartbeat runnin' away
Don't you hear that heartbeat comin' your way?

"I'd like to know what's going through your mind when you're being impossibly polite to that bastard," he grunts.
"I'd like to know what's on yours."
"Turn the car round and I'll show you."
"Alright."

Oh, it be like
Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass

Realising Hannibal had spoken in earnest, Will puts a hand on the other's arm, the gesture keeping him from stopping the car. Hooded eyes continue to watch the road as they drive through the desert.

Can't you hear that
Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass?

Not yet. Exhaling through the nose, he is about to remove his hand when he feels fingers sliding over his knuckles and lowers his eyes to watch the hand covering his own.

Boy, you got my heartbeat runnin' away

"The lion's den is never free from bones," says Hannibal. "But a bite from a lion is still better than the look of envy."

Beating like a drum and it's coming your way

"What's that supposed to mean?" Will utters, taking his hand back and folding his arms.
"It is easy to be intimidated by-"
"I am not intimidated."
"Whether you are or not-"
"I'm not."
A small pause.

Can't you hear that
Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass?

“It would be a costly mistake to underestimate he who has a savage breast,” Hannibal continues to say in a neutral voice. “Which is why I have never once underestimated you.”

You got that super bass

For a moment, blue eyes continue to stare at the road before looking towards that impassive countenance – the open sincerity veiled by his low sweeping lashes – and away again.

Boom, badoom, boom, boom, badoom, boom, bass

As the song comes to an end, Will lets his head fall back against the seat.
“I think I always knew you believed in me,” he utters quietly. “The worst in me, they would say.”
“The devil at your ear,” says Hannibal fondly.
“I whispered back,” Will murmurs, eyes falling to a half close. In his peripheral vision, he sees Hannibal leaning his head back against the seat also.
“I listened,” he murmurs in a hushed voice. “Most covetously.”

Yeah, that's the super bass

Long Haul

Although Will had been determined not to express too much empathy for Mohamed's son, his conscience begins to press the case the closer they come to leaving the country. After a long stretch of silence in the car, Hannibal eventually pipes up, his voice casual and light.
"You're worried," he says.
"Am I," Will utters, eyes on the empty landscape outside the window.
"About the boy."
It is true. As was Hannibal's assumption that Will is only behaving callously because he has come to believe that to behave otherwise in this world is a sign of weakness. The other had reminded him not to resort to cruelty simply because they are surrounded by it. Had reminded him of that part of Will which still existed despite their baptism following the fall. *Whilst you could not save yourself*, Hannibal had said, *it remains in your nature to try and save others*. Why the man felt the need to remind him, Will doesn't know. Perhaps he wished to differentiate one cruelty from another. To reassure him that despite Mohamed's far reaching power and influence and Will's own paucity in such, he still has his merits. But of course, this notion of reassurance only serves to dig another thorn into his side until he resembles the desert flora of these sun scorched planes.
"I am going to share with you some information that may help to put your mind at ease," says Hannibal when Will does not comment further.
He looks away from the window to watch Hannibal's profile.
"Go on."
"You are aware Salma influenced Mohamed to turn against his own son," Hannibal begins to explain.
"That's what you said."
"Following her sister's death, Salma paid good money for a DNA test claiming Kosey is not Mohamed's."
"And he believed it," scoffs Will.
"Mohamed has never been much interested in children," Hannibal continues to say. "He kept the nanny so he wouldn't have to deal with the child. Salma had hoped for more serious repercussions following such a revelation, of course."
"Naturally," Will echoes drily, wondering what percentage of the rich and powerful are either inhumane or insane.
"I believe he couldn't bring himself to murder a child who resembled the first person he fell in love with."
Will cannot refrain from snorting.
"You mean he's capable of loving anyone that's not himself?"
"Either way," says Hannibal. "Salma had overlooked something rather important."
"The suspense is killing me."
"A real DNA test was never conducted."
A pause.
"So Kosey isn't Mohamed's."
"No."
Will looks at Hannibal. For a moment, neither says anything. Then, in a quiet and uneasy voice, Will speaks.
"He's yours?"
A smile lifts those lips. Amused.
"I'm afraid you've got the wrong cannibal."
"Christ," Will utters, folding his arms. "Does he know? The father, I mean."
"Yes."
"And his wife?"

“Alima is not Salma. You don’t have to worry about her trying to murder the boy. If anything, she was probably trying for one.” A brief pause. “With you.”
Frowning, Will glances at the other from the corners of his eyes.
“She refuses to accept she cannot bear children,” Hannibal continues to say, and Will moves a hand onto his face. “Another Margot.”
“Don’t.”
“Life is funny, isn’t it, Will. So many who wish to ensure your progeny.”
“They don’t do it for me.”
“I did.”
He closes his eyes beneath the shield of his hand.
“I did it for us.”
Inhaling sharply, Will drops his hand and keeps his face turned to the window.
“So you’re telling me we don’t have to worry about the child being eaten,” he says, keen to steer them away from the past. “I’ll go back to worrying about having my brains devoured instead.” Only to realise the past is constantly interrupting the present like the wind moving the dunes. There is no respite from it.
“If that remains a concern of yours.”
He glances at Hannibal who continues to watch the road ahead as he drives. Hooded eyes half drawn, he wears a thoughtful expression on his face, and Will averts his gaze before he becomes too affected by that familiar look of nostalgia resurfacing like a bloated corpse in those dark and bottomless depths.

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The flight from Dubai to Tokyo is a lengthy duration of nine hours, during which Will has his wounds looked over by Hannibal in the confined space of the plane restroom. Sitting on the toilet with his trousers down so the other can inspect the gash in his thigh, there isn’t much he can do to hide the inevitable response to the touch of his hands and the sight of the man crouched down before him. As Hannibal pries at the mouth of the cut enough to make him grimace, Will fixes his eyes on the carrier hung on the door behind him.
“Is that necessary?” he utters, glancing down at the fresh rivulet of blood.
“I like to be thorough,” Hannibal replies as he wipes the area clean.
“Should’ve taken her up on her offer,” says Will, referring to the air hostess who had brought them the first aid kit Hannibal had requested and asked whether they would like some assistance.
“Indeed,” says Hannibal drily, and Will catches the other glancing at his erection while he opens a square dressing.
“I mean she’d go easier on the wounds.”
Hannibal hums, a quiet and sceptical sound as he presses the dressing over the cut. It takes a considerable amount of self-control from Will not to respond to his cynicism. Physically. With a hand in his hair and another grasping himself.
“Put on your new suit,” Hannibal instructs while standing up with the first aid box.
Will also stands up from the toilet, and for a moment they are reminded of the lack of space. A sudden spell of turbulence serves to emphasise this fact as Hannibal takes an involuntary step towards him. The box in his hands pressing into Will’s stomach. Lifting his eyes, he meets black briefly before glancing down again. He utters his thanks and Hannibal turns to leave. With the door closed once more, Will faces the toilet, lifts the lid, and seeks quick relief before moving to wash his hands then his face in the sink. *I’m thinking it might do some good if we returned to how things were*. Closing his eyes, he feels the cold water droplets running down his skin. *When were you thinking?* Presses his brow to the mirror as he releases a quiet sigh that mists the glass. *Before the fall, maybe.*

Back in his seat and buckled down with a blanket, Will tries to catch some sleep. Upon the next wave of turbulence, he opens his eyes and knows he is on a different plane. On a flight bound for Italy. He

knows who is sat beside him. Closes his eyes again so he can't see her.
"We were all supposed to leave together. He made a place for us."
"Not in Dubai, I hope," he utters, and her gentle giggle feels very close to his ear.
"You don't like Dubai?"
"I don't like certain people who live there."
"Where are you going now?"
"Wherever he decides."
"I've always wanted to visit Japan."
Eyes slipping open, Will looks to his side. Sees Abigail sat beside the window. Her body turned towards him. Her head resting against the seat. The harsh light coming through the window illuminates half her face, leaving the rest in shadow. Eyes downcast, she is smiling at a small flower she twirls slowly in her fingers. Past it, Will stares at the dark fountain flowing freely from the opening in her throat. It runs down her clothes and splatters the heap of flowers piling gently in her lap.
"I'd like to see the cherry blossoms," she says, and Will reaches up with his hand to take the flower.
"I'm afraid it's not the right season, Abigail," he says quietly, waiting for her to meet his apologetic gaze.

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Hannibal feels the weight lifting from his shoulder and glances askance to see Will blinking the sleep from his eyes. The way his hand darts up to swipe at the moisture that had seeped whilst he slept before he turns his face to look out the window. Yet there is nothing to see beyond the heavy darkness of the sky and clouds superimposed by their reflections on the glass. The regret in his eyes is made stark by the overhead spotlight Hannibal had kept on for reading.
"How long do we have left?" he murmurs, avoiding his gaze in the window.
"Hours," Hannibal replies. "Go back to sleep." He presses the button for the light, relieving them of its scrutiny, and watches as Will settles back against his seat in the dark, his face turned towards the window still. Closing the magazine in his hands, Hannibal puts his head back and closes his eyes. Tries to let the white noise of the plane melt into the roar of the stream. To find him there, stood parting the water in his waders. Teaching her how to cast. The half forming sky brightens unexpectedly, however, and he opens his eyes. Glances across the aisle to the passenger stirring in her seat. Her blonde hair aglow with spotlight as she leans down to retrieve a tablet and a folded newspaper. His eyes fall on the printed image.

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It feels as though he had drifted off again after waking from the dream, and had been asleep for a significant duration of the flight. When he opens his eyes, sunlight is pouring in through the windows, flooding the aisles and washing over the rows of occupied seats. Sitting up, he realises the seat beside him is empty, and looks up at the sound of approaching footsteps. Jack appears and begins to slowly ease himself down into the unoccupied space beside him. A feeling of familiarity, warm and comforting, makes Will ease back in his seat.
"Feels good to be getting out," the man exhales.
"You and I both," Will utters.
"You keep some interesting friends these days," says the older man, and Will looks to his side. Sees Jack watching him with lofted brows.
"They're not my friends," says Will, holding that sceptical gaze.
"What's his is yours."
A pause as Will waits for Jack to finish.
"And what's yours is his," the man says, eyes falling to a half close. "Am I right, Will?"
Face pinching, Jack grunts softly and Will sits forward as the other presses a hand to his chest.

Grasping Jack's shoulder, Will tries to take a better look at him.
"I'm getting too old for this," says Jack breathlessly, and Will stares at the dark patch spreading through his shirt.
"Jack," he whispers in panic, eyes wide as they fixate on his own hands applying pressure over the wound. The skin washing red. "Stay with me," he utters, and a responding grunt makes him look up. Hooded eyes struggle to stay open as they meet his stare. His breath escaping his sharp lips in shallow bursts. His chest rising and falling unevenly beneath the press of Will's hands.
Hannibal?
His own breath catches in his throat when the other struggles to say his name. Lodges there like a knife as a cold sweat breaks over his skin. As he feels the tackiness of the blood being rubbed between their grasping fingers.

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At the sound of Will crying out, Hannibal looks over, his hand pausing in the middle of turning a page. Hands grasping the ends of the arm rests, Will sits there panting with his mouth agape and eyes staring ahead. The sight reminds Hannibal of the electric chair and Will's nightmares of being strapped into one. Folding the paper, he hands it back to the woman who accepts it with a polite smile.
"Apologies," he says, rising from the seat. "I must check on my companion."
"Of course."
He glances at her again before moving back across the aisle and into his seat. He hears Will's breath begin to steady and turns his face to look the man over. He can smell the fear saturating his new clothes.
"Bad dream?" he asks casually with his legs crossed and hands clasped in his lap.
"New friend?" Will asks lowly in return, blue eyes swivelling slowly his way. They are clear and unwavering, yet holding the remnants of tears around the edges.
"The editor of a food magazine."
"Oh yeah?"
Hannibal watches the other roll his eyes. The cynicism undermined by the glistening dregs of salt.
"She is writing an interesting article."
"What about."
"The prevalence of pomegranates on the European crime scene."
With Will leaning back in his seat, Hannibal studies that look of suspicious curiosity up close as those eyes look past him to the passenger sat across the aisle. Finding them in such close proximity, he takes a casual sniff of Will's scent. Enjoys the familiar mixture of borrowed cologne and perspiration.
"Even the cologne of an airline's bathroom is an improvement on your usual choice," he cannot resist commenting in a hushed murmur.
"I could be wearing cat piss and you'd still get excited," Will utters under his breath. "Unless you're just having your ego blown by another journalist." Hannibal does not stop himself smiling a little at that look of disdain on the other's face. Those blue eyes leaving his new acquaintance to hover without meeting his gaze.
"Mine's not a married woman."
Hannibal watches Will lick his lips as he slowly inhales. Awaits the man's retort with another little tug at the corner of his lips.
"Came up in conversation did it?"
"As I'm sure it did not for you," Hannibal answers. "Only conversation I heard did not involve speech." He brushes invisible lint from his lap.
"If you're that jealous, why don't you proposition her."
"I could," says Hannibal lightly with a tilt of his head. "But I won't."
An air hostess walks past with a tray and Hannibal catches her attention with a raised hand. Takes a couple of the offered glasses and smiles politely at the hostess before passing one to Will.

“Why not?” he hears the utterance as Will lifts the glass to his lips. Hannibal takes a sip of his orange juice and licks his lips before watching the other from the corners of his lidded eyes.
“I’m not desperate,” he says, looking away as he smiles into his juice.

Tokyo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If the sight of looming cranes and lofty, gleaming buildings springing up all over Dubai had been out of tune with his preference for the less refined, the city of Tokyo was no different. Yet unlike their previous destination, this vast and sprawling metropolis had clearly been a product of time. Almost every inch of land seemed occupied. If not by sand, then with urban infrastructure that lit up the night with its myriad of fluorescent hues. Whilst they were landing, Will had looked down at those endless swatches illuminated by streetlights and buildings, all connected to winding highways that winked with their constant flow of traffic like blood cells through an artery. They had made their way quickly and efficiently through the airport, and as he'd stood there, holding the gaze of the immigration officer, Will had tried not to think of Mohamed's part to play in the next chapter of their journeying. He did, however, look out for someone holding a sign in the arrivals lobby, and was glad to see them making their own way to the taxi rank instead.

The drive had taken under an hour and Will had recognised, as the car approached the mammoth building, something of that defiance with which Hannibal had chosen their residence in Paris. Once more, they are staying in accommodation located in the heart of the city, and he can only assume the audacity of such a choice to be dually driven by knowing one has the support of an influential individual as well as the loss of the potential pressure that comes with being pursued. Before Jack can

surface in his mind again, Will busies himself by taking in the new surroundings and following Hannibal into the establishment.

That which is lacking in the picture of dense urbanity is made up for to a degree within the large space of the lobby. Huge paintings of flowers take up the main walls as voluminous floral arrangements sit upon central and side tables. The light green tones of the décor combine with the touches of wooden panelling to soften the coldness of the white marble floor. It strikes Will as he stands there in the quiet lobby, how long he has been away from the familiarity of home comforts. If not the wooden dining table of the home he shared with Molly, then the modest kitchen of their base. The floors of which had known the blood of an enemy, and beyond which, outside in the garden, they had buried a dog. They are two very different pictures of domesticity, if the latter can pertain to the usual implications of such a word, but he is used to having everything he has ever known being rewritten, and appears to resist less vehemently the hand that moves his.

Stepping into the hotel room is, for a brief moment, like stepping back in time. Before the lights come on, they are met with the midnight glow of the cityscape through the window forming the end of the room, and he half expects to find the shimmering pool of Sophia's dress lying on the carpeted floor.
"I'm afraid they ran out of singles," says Hannibal, and Will looks towards the bed. It hadn't occurred to him that such a request would have been made. He has gotten used to sharing, it seems. As he stands there without commenting, Hannibal leaves his case to step up to the window.

"Why don't you have a shower, Will," he continues to say as he pulls the veil of the curtains to, and Will glances around for the bathroom. Realises that, with the exception of some minimum wood panelling, its walls are made up of panes of glass, with the only respite from such transparency coming in the form of a single sliding door which currently stands open. "Perhaps it will help you sleep." It is true he had sweated in his new clothes during the flight, and can do with washing the dregs of his guilt and fear down the plughole. He begins to shrug out of his suit jacket and drops it onto the bed as he sits down upon the edge to untie his shoes. As he undresses, he follows the other's movements with his eyes. Watches as Hannibal removes his own suit jacket and picks Will's up on his way to the open wardrobe. Having hung up both jackets and brushed them down to his satisfaction, the man pauses as though feeling the weight of Will's gaze on him, and turns his face. Looking away, Will finishes stripping down to his boxers and is about to walk into the bathroom when Hannibal hands him a folded robe.
"It is more comfortable," he explains simply, and Will utters his thanks before taking the dark square of fabric.

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When he comes back out into the bedroom, Hannibal is sat on the chaise lounge by the window. Looking very much at home in his Japanese robe as he sits there with his legs stretched out before him and crossed at the ankles. The tablet in his lap. As Will pulls the sliding door to a close behind him, hooded eyes look up.
"Did you manage with your wounds?" he asks, putting down the tablet.
"Just about," Will answers, hands on the belt of his robe. He isn't sure if he is supposed to keep it on, but he doesn't ask as Hannibal makes his way to the bathroom. In the end, he climbs in to bed still wearing the robe. It is thin enough to sleep in, he supposes, and lies there with his arms resting atop the cover. He glances towards the bathroom. Although the door is pulled to, he can see the back of Hannibal's head and the tops of his shoulders through the glass as he reclines in the bath. After a while, Hannibal slowly slips below the waterline, and Will finds himself waiting for the other to resurface. When he doesn't, Will stirs himself and, hesitating a moment longer, pushes the cover out the way before climbing out of bed. Pushing the door back, he looks in just as Hannibal resurfaces

with a sharp gasp. Dark eyes opening to regard Will blankly as water droplets fall from his lashes. His wet lips hanging agape.
“Is something wrong?” he asks, moving a hand over his face, and Will straightens up on the threshold.
“I need to piss,” he utters, looking towards the toilet.
“By all means.”
Walking past the bath, Will faces Hannibal with his back as he lifts the seat and fumbles with the belt on his robe. After doing his business, he turns around, adjusting his belt, and starts to walk out. Upon passing the bath, he sees Hannibal kneading subtly at his shoulder and pauses as he recalls the cause of the injury.
“Do you need painkillers,” he asks.
“It’s not so bad,” answers Hannibal as he closes his eyes and slowly rolls his neck. “How about you?”
“I’m fine.”
With one more glance, this time at the long scar in the other’s wrist, Will walks out of the bathroom and slides the door closed behind him. Climbs into bed and lies there watching the back of Hannibal’s head pressing against the glass until he drifts off.

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A nightmare of Hannibal’s head slipping down into the red water makes him open his eyes and realise he is alone in the room. Sitting up, he looks at the clock on the beside table. *4am*. Sees the note sitting in front of it. *Swimming*. Getting out of bed, he gets dressed and leaves the room.

There is nobody in the area except Hannibal. From the entrance, Will watches him in the pool, cutting back and forth in his freestyle stroke. When the man shows no sign of stopping, he paces towards the loungers parked by the edge of the water, and sits down on one of them. Eventually, Hannibal tires and emerges from the water to fold his arms upon the edge of the pool nearest to Will.
“Can’t sleep?” he pants as he looks up at Will. Droplets running off the sharp crest of his cheekbones.
“I could ask you the same,” says Will, leaning forward and folding his arms upon his legs. “When were you up?” he asks. He must’ve slept solidly if he hadn’t noticed the other climbing into bed.
“About an hour ago,” Hannibal answers, chin resting on his arm. “I dreamt I was drowning,” he says simply, glancing sidelong at the cityscape through the ceiling to floor windows. Will snorts quietly, his eyes falling to a half close as he follows the other’s gaze.
“So you thought you’d go for a dip?” he utters sarcastically.
“It helped me after the incident with Matthew Brown.”
He looks at that sharp profile.
“He was watching me like you were just now,” Hannibal continues to say, voice quiet and thoughtful.
“Except you’re not wearing budgie smuggling speedos.”
“So you had time to notice those,” Will scoffs sardonically despite the rising current of regret.
“And the gun.”
Will turns his eyes back on the window.
“Are you coming up?” he asks eventually, voice quiet.
“Soon.”
He looks down at the other. Hooded eyes look up again.
“I’d like to finish a few more laps.”
“Alright.”

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Will lies in bed, waiting for Hannibal to come in. Since the other mentioned Brown’s attempt on his life, he had been restless with regret. Whilst he was by the pool still, he had to wait until Hannibal had swum away before he could turn his face from the window.

The door opens and he pretends to be asleep. He can hear the other moving quietly in the dark. When the sounds finally stop and the room falls silent, Will opens his eyes to the faint early morning light coming through the veil and finds Hannibal on the chaise lounge. A blanket draped over him as he sleeps with his face turned to the window. Exhaling inwardly, Will closes his eyes and promptly falls into a dream.

He is walking down the long corridor towards their room. Opening the door, he stalks his way over to the chaise lounge. Hannibal is lying asleep beneath the blanket. Breathing heavily, Will snatches the blanket with his bloody hands and tugs it off the other. As hooded eyes blink open sleepily beneath the soft spikes of his hair, Will grabs his throat with one hand while his other hurriedly works open the front of his trousers. He feels Hannibal swallowing beneath the press of his palm and lets go to yank open his robe before grabbing his legs behind the knees and shoving them back against his slowly heaving chest. Lips parting, black eyes look up at him through their lashes as Will spits onto himself and, half falling onto Hannibal in his haste, takes himself in hand. An animalistic groan escapes through his teeth as he buries himself in Hannibal's heat and proceeds to fuck him until the legs of the chaise lounge begins to gouge its way along the carpet. Beneath him, Hannibal pants shallowly for his breath. Eyes closed. Dick leaking and shuddering with each of Will's thrusts. His own hands pinning back his legs.

"Nobody touches you," Will grits through his teeth, back arching as he rams himself repeatedly into Hannibal's willing body. "Nobody," he grunts, watching down at that euphoric expression. The night they were on the cliff. "Nobody," he pants, feeling himself expanding rapidly within the other. "Say it," he rasps, voice suddenly weak and pleading. A cut appears in Hannibal's throat and slowly makes its way to the other side. Panicking, Will surges down to catch Hannibal within the crushing circle of his arms. *Does it feel nice?* Those words again, stroking the shell of Will's ear as they race through Paris. Heart pounding at the thought of losing him. Hammering tenfold with each past occasion that could have cost him his life. Fit to bursting with the weight of the unknown. *Mano aistringas berniukas*. His voice is a breathless whisper that makes Will press up on his arms as their bodies continue to smack feverishly together. *Ar tu vėl sapnuoji mane?* He stares down at the blood pouring from Hannibal's slit throat. At dark eyes rolling into the back of his head beneath those fluttering lashes. *S-skauda, Will*. *Tu mane skaudini.* And comes.

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

"Mano aistringas berniukas" - "My passionate boy"
"Ar tu vėl sapnuoji mane?" - "Are you dreaming of me again?"
"Skauda" - "Ow"
"Tu mane skaudini" - "You're hurting me"

The Hostess

Chapter Notes

New Major Character Reference can be found in End Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Will."
At the sound of his voice, Will slowly opens his eyes to find Hannibal stood at the foot of the bed, fully dressed with his hair combed back. Blinking from the brightness of the room, his half drawn gaze lowers upon his own body lying upon the bed. Sees tossed sheets kicked aside. His robe open. His flaccid dick hanging out of his boxers. There is dried semen spanning his belly and chest, the sight of which makes him sit up hurriedly and tug the robe closed.
"I rang the number on the business card," explains Hannibal. "The receptionist said to come at our earliest convenience."
Will drags his eyes off the bed to meet that mild countenance.
"They are ready to receive us," Hannibal adds.
Looking away, Will climbs off the bed.
"I'll be quick," he utters, standing up with the robe held closed.
"There's no rush," says Hannibal, and Will walks over to the open doorway of the glass box of a bathroom. As he slides the door to and turns on the shower, he finds himself thinking about Hannibal waking up and discovering him like that. Finds himself wondering whether hooded eyes had watched or barely batted an eyelid before the man went to get himself ready.

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"We have been invited to breakfast at the restaurant," says Hannibal.
This new piece of information brings a crinkle to Will's brow as he continues to watch the green stretch of trees through the taxi window until they pass the entrance to the gardens of the Imperial Palace. A momentary escape from urbanity in the centre of the busy capital.
"I had intended to take us to Tsukiji," Hannibal continues to explain. "The sushi served at the establishments there are renowned for being both the freshest and finest around."
Will feels his stomach churning.
"I'm not sure which I prefer," he utters sardonically. *Raw fish first thing in the morning or…*
"I was assured breakfast at the restaurant would be on par."
"Great," Will scoffs quietly as he continues to look out the window. "I hope they do vegetarian."

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The taxi takes them into the inner city and high rise buildings tower over them from either side, replacing the trees and sky. Brand names appear on stylish facades, signalling the affluence of the area as shiny surfaces accentuate the glare of the morning light. The restaurant itself sits amidst all this, in a city within a city, and to reach it, they have to walk from their drop off point outside a Gucci store and down a lane of expensive looking coffee shops occupying the base of towering skyscrapers until they come upon a boulevard lined with trees. At the very end, beyond a flight of stone steps and a public sculpture, their destination awaits: a low and spread out bit of commercial industrial

architecture. Its ultra-modernism obscured at the front by artistically placed trees that look so immaculate, they could be artificial. Standing at the top of the boulevard, watching the establishment from afar, Will thinks suddenly of an abattoir. The high rise buildings forming a grey backdrop to its squat dimensions only add to the vague feeling of being penned in. Already, it did not sit well with him, even from a distance.
"Is it too late to choose the other place," he says, glancing askance to see Hannibal stood with his hands in his trouser pockets. Chin lifted. Head tilted. Those dark eyes taking in the environment as fair lashes flutter in the gentle breeze. The all too familiar look of curiosity is answer enough, and Will returns his gaze to the restaurant.

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As they approach those concrete walls and huge, metal frame windows, Will sees trees on the other side of the glass. A bizarre attempt, he surmises, to make nature the interior of an otherwise blank outer shell. While he casts an eye over the groomed trees and box hedging sectioning off the outdoor seating, a young woman dressed in a skirt suit comes out to greet them. Her friendly demeanour and welcoming smile makes Will wonder how much she knows about the establishment.
"Please follow me," she says politely, and Hannibal complies without hesitation, leaving Will to linger a beat longer on the flagstones before reluctantly entering the building after them.
Inside, trees circle streaming fountains as more box hedging mark out plush seating areas which in turn surround the trees. As well as large chandeliers hanging over the fountains, smaller, individual ones hang low from the beams of the glass roof ceiling, posing, to Will at least, as potential hazards. Currently, however, there are no customers sat at the small tables.
"We don't open until the evening," the receptionist explains, following Will's observing eye, and he is about to make a noise of understanding when he hears a familiar sound. It travels its way to the end of the corridor ahead of them. Then emerges suddenly from around the corner. Will stands there watching the Japanese Chin watching them.
"Oh, that is our owner's dog," the receptionist begins to say as the animal blinks its wide set eyes and licks its nose. Having already removed his hands from his pockets unconsciously, Will waits as the small creature starts trotting in their direction. Ignoring the receptionist who bends down to intercept it, the dog goes round her to stand at Will's feet, its feathery white plume of a tail brushing back and forth against its back as it looks up at him with its large black eyes.
"Hey," Will utters in greeting, squatting down to pet its head before reaching for the silver name tag. Turning it over, he finds a Japanese character.
"He's called Mr Han," translates the receptionist, and Will looks up at Hannibal stood beside him.
"Interesting name," he says pointedly with an arched eyebrow, but Hannibal merely studies the dog with a thoughtful expression.
"Han means companion in Japanese," he says simply.
"It also means to sail," adds the receptionist with a smile.
"Sailing to find one's companion, perhaps."
The meaning of Hannibal's comment is lost on the young woman who continues to smile nonetheless, but it's not lost on Will. He looks at the other man as he straightens up. A small pressure on his shin makes him look back down. The dog is standing up on its back legs, its front paws leaning against him.
"He likes you," says the receptionist.
"I already have a companion," says Will, leaning down to pick up the dog. "He's just not as cute as you," he exhales, straightening back up again.
"What would make him more adorable?" Hannibal asks innocently as they continue walking down the corridor. "If he got down on all fours?"
Stroking under the dog's chin, Will glances at the other from the corners of his eyes.
"Doesn't have the same effect," he says under his breath, "you wagging that devil's tail."

A smile lifts the corners of Hannibal's lips and disappears again just as they are shown a room identical to the ones at the front of the restaurant. Another flowing fountain plays centrepiece to its circle of trees, their branches laden with leaves and stretching up to the glass ceiling like grasping fingers. Beneath their gnarled and twisting forms, the tables and chairs sit empty.
"I see you have met Mr Han."
The voice is familiar. He has heard it once before. Looking ahead, Will sees someone leaning into view from behind the fountain. Through the veil of falling water, he sees her face. Framed by the same golden curls. The same red-lipped smile. *The woman from the flight*. The editor of a food magazine. Supposedly. *Did he know?* He looks at Hannibal, but his face gives nothing away. *He would've told me*, says a voice in his head. *Like he told you about Daniel in Paris?* says another. The receptionist stands with her hands clasped before her, hanging back with an expectant smile. Hannibal begins to make his way over. Will matches his stride with pretend conviction.

She lowers the teacup in her hand as they near, and as she looks up at them, Will can see clearly the cool grey of her upturned eyes.
"Interesting name," he says casually as he mimics Hannibal and lowers himself onto one of the two chairs pulled up to the small circular table.
"It means," she begins to say.
"Companion," Will interrupts, holding her gaze as she smiles. Yet, despite the generous line of her lips, he reads a certain loftiness in that countenance. The way she regards them mildly with her lidded eyes. Realises, now that they are sat across from one another, that the woman bears an uncanny resemblance to Hannibal.
"Indeed," she says, "for what purpose do we give the pleasures of life if they cannot be shared?"
Without waiting for a response, she looks down with enthusiasm at the table. Its white marble surface covered in small plates.
"Please," she says brightly, the smile still on her lips as she lifts her eyes to meet their gaze. "As promised. Using only our finest ingredients."
"They look most inviting," says Hannibal politely.
"But what of the taste?"
The question, delivered in the smooth, faintly accented alto of her voice, is dangerously seductive, and Will watches the way she fixates on Hannibal. Before those eyes suddenly turn his way.
"Would you like to hand him over?" she asks, shifting in her seat and turning her palms up. Without saying anything, Will leans closer and passes over the dog. Lowering back into his seat, he doesn't break eye contact even when she brings that delicate red and white head to her lips for a fond kiss. Grey eyes watching him from the corners.
"Pasta with truffle and mushrooms," comments Hannibal, and Will stops staring at their hostess to look down at the tiny portion. "Locally sourced?" Hannibal asks.
"Imported," she answers. "From Greece."
Will recalls that night at Mohamed's when Hannibal had sat down to speak with him. *Police in Kalambaka have received a missing persons report from the Holy Monastery of Saint Stephen.*
"Who is your supplier?" he asks, looking up from the table.
"I'm afraid that information is privy to certain individuals only," she answers, voice low and playful.
Refraining from speaking, Will smiles in return. A lopsided twitch of the lips to replace words of sarcasm. But this self-restraint does not last long and, head tilting, lashes lowering, he studies her openly with a faint narrowing of his eyes.
"Perhaps if I read your magazine," he says lowly.
"Perhaps," she echoes, voice light. Smile wide.
The delicate sound of silver striking against porcelain draws the attention of both grey and blue. Unperturbed by their gazes, Hannibal reaches for his glass of water and takes a polite sip.
"I'm afraid this dish is rather lacking in flavour," he says afterwards, setting down the glass. "The line

between subtlety and tastelessness can be tricky to gauge," he adds.
Their hostess makes a thoughtful sound as she strokes the dog in her lap. Then, picking up the plate in front of her, she leans forward to place it carefully before them on the table.
"There should be no mistaking the wealth of flavour in this dish," she states, leaning back with a confident smile. Will considers the paper thin ribbons of flesh.
Police in Kalambaka have received a missing persons report from the Holy Monastery of Saint Stephen.
"The main ingredient, you shall find, has aged well," she continues to say. "Giving it a rather distinct flavour."
Without hesitating, Hannibal brings his fork to the plate. Under her watch, Will waits for Hannibal to take his sample before he picks up his own fork and slides its prongs into the meat. Holding her stare, he lifts the morsel to his lips. Takes it into his mouth. And slowly chews. Picking up her own fork, she spears delicately the remaining slither. Will watches those red lips parting to receive the flesh. For a moment, they sit in silence as they eat, Will taking his time to masticate, not so much to savour the flavour as to suppress the waves of nausea. He waits until she is not watching to steal a sidelong glance at Hannibal. Doesn't know which he finds more difficult to swallow – the meat itself or the sight of the man quietly relishing the offering.
"As you know, I have been following the prevalent use of certain ingredients on the European crime scene," says their hostess as she lowers the dog to the floor. "The pomegranate, for instance, is a particularly powerful symbol in the culinary arts." She picks up a tablet from the space beside her. "It represents the changing of the seasons. Of death and rebirth." Turning the tablet around, she presents it to them over the table. Hannibal receives it between his hands. Putting his fork down, Will looks down at the black screen.

Hannibal presses play and the silent video footage begins to take them on a visual tour of a real life sculpture. An old man hangs suspended in the air, his back peeled into wings which stretch out behind him. Immediately, Will recognises the tribute to Bernini. The composition: Truth Unveiled by Time. Fixed to the old man's hand is a corner of the drapery being pulled from and exposing the body sat upright beneath him. Instead of a female, however, a young man sits in her place. Instead of a globe, his foot rests upon a giant pomegranate spilling over with seeds. Instead of the sun, he holds the skinned face of a wolf. His hair is a mass of dark, unruly curls. His staring eyes blue.

Despite the involuntary flexing of his jaw, Will does not look away as the camera continues to move in on the composition, slowing eventually to a crawling pace as it lingers over the details.

"In response to criticism, Bernini created Truth Unveiled by Time," says their hostess. "As a result of cracks appearing in the façade of his towers, orders were given for their destruction, and in his humiliation, he created the sculpture as a message to his critics."
Will looks up at her thoughtful gaze.
"He hoped that time would both silent his enemies and reveal the truth about his works," she continues to explain. "In his will, he left the incomplete sculpture to the first-born in the family. Tell me."
She stares through her lashes at Hannibal.
"Are either of you fathers?"
Will looks at Hannibal from the corners of his eyes. When neither of them answers, a look of sympathy appears on her face.
"Shame," she says softly, her gaze remaining on Hannibal.
Looking away, Will reaches for his glass of water.
"How did you come across this footage?" he asks.
"It was sent to me," she answers.
"You specifically," he says, looking at her as he lifts the glass to his lips.

“I presume they knew I would make a comparison.”
She watches him for a moment then turns to retrieve something from the cushions beside her.
“The original tribute,” she announces, presenting to them a glossy A4 photograph. It captures all the stark details of the composition, and transports Will back to the hotel room in Thessaloniki. “You must agree it is artistically compromised.”
Eyes on the shrouded head of the dead girl, Will does not comment. Only when a second photo is laid atop the first does he sit back with a sharp inhale.
“See?” she says.
Will averts his eyes from the image and reaches for his glass. Lifting it, his hand begins to twitch, and he carefully sets it back down. The photos are withdrawn and Will swallows before staring at her indifferent expression.
“So what is your assessment,” he utters slowly.
“Perhaps if you read my magazine,” she says with a lofting of her eyebrows. “But really,” she continues to say with a tilt to her head, “I would very much love to hear your thoughts on both versions.” Those colourless eyes bore into him through the veil of lowering lashes, and for a moment, Will fails to think of a retort. The sound of approaching footsteps releases him from her scrutiny as she looks up at the interruption.
“Madame,” says the receptionist from before. “You have a call.”
Their hostess hums thoughtfully before dismissing the other with a nod.
“I’m afraid I must leave you gentlemen for the time being,” she announces. “My apologies.”
Leaning down, she scoops the dog into her arms before standing.
“Please, enjoy the rest of your breakfast,” she says entreatingly with a smile. “Let my receptionist know of any needs that you may have.” She looks at Hannibal. “I look forward to our next meeting.”
Looks at Will. Then leaves the table.

He sits without moving until the sound of her heels has completely disappeared. Looking over his shoulder, he sees they are alone, yet doesn’t feel comfortable voicing his thoughts until they have left the premises. Instead, he reaches once more for his water. Picks up the glass with a steady hand and takes a generous gulp. Beside him, Hannibal is sitting quietly with his hands clasped in his lap.
Lowering the glass, Will looks at the small plates.
“Aged well, she says.”
“How did you find it?” Hannibal asks, voice light and curious.
“How did I find eating a piece of old man?” says Will sarcastically under his breath. “Better if you don’t tell me which part of him it came from.”
“Then I won’t.”
Finishing his water, Will puts the glass down and folds his arms as he lifts his eyes searchingly to the concrete walls. *There’s bound to be hidden security cameras here.*
“Don’t mind me,” he mutters. “It’s been a while for you after all. Might as well eat for the both of us.”
When Hannibal doesn’t respond, Will lowers his gaze upon the small plates. Sitting up, he picks up a dish and places it in front of the other.
“You don’t have to pretend you’re not enjoying it,” he utters, watching those hooded eyes.
“It’s not my intention to do so,” Hannibal replies.
Arms refolding, Will sits back in his chair. Turns his face to stare at the bark of the tree standing beside them.
“No,” he scoffs quietly. “Why would it be.”

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Will had sat in silence as he ate. Now, he sits in silence beside him in the backseat of the taxi. Meeting the driver’s eyes in the rear view mirror, Hannibal anticipates a spike in Will’s continuing unease as he gives a different address to that of the hotel.

“Where are we going?” asks Will, his voice a mixture of anxiety and caution. The coolness and composure with which he had conducted himself at the restaurant having quite evaporated.
“It’s a surprise,” he answers.
“I want to go back,” says Will.
“We will,” says Hannibal.
Sitting forward, Will makes to speak to the driver as he indicates to pull out. Hannibal puts his hand on Will’s arm.
“Please,” he says quietly. “Trust me.”
He watches the other continue to stare ahead as they pull away from the curb. Eventually, Will sits back.
“That’s the problem,” he utters, turning his face to look out his window. He doesn’t finish his sentence, but Hannibal can feel the weight of the unsaid nonetheless. He continues to watch Will for a while. Considers the things he could say to appease him. Finally, he decides it will be best for the man to see for himself, and settles back against the seat. Turns his face to look out his own window.

Chapter End Notes

New Major Character Reference

‘The hostess’ and Japanese Chin, Han

Hecate

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The taxi pulls up at a petrol station. Across it, Will sees a pale brick building with large floor length windows, upon which are stuck posters of domestic animals. His eyes lift to the Japanese characters. The cartoon logo of a dog and a cat.

“Is this a joke?” he starts to say, but Hannibal has already paid the driver and is getting out of the vehicle. Doing the same, Will slams the door shut and hurries after the other.

“Hey,” he cries as Hannibal crosses the road, pausing to let a car pass before jogging over to catch up with the man as he climbs the steps up to the building.

“We don’t have time for this,” Will continues to say as Hannibal opens the establishment door. “Are you even-”

Going in after him, Will walks straight into the other’s back as Hannibal stops in front of the tiny reception desk flanked by wooden dog gates. Stepping back, he looks into the space beyond as he hears Hannibal exchanging greetings with a woman in English. Sees a couple of Charles Spaniels tripping their way up to the gate. He hears Hannibal being referred to as Mr Jones before the gate is opened for them. The woman stands back with her hands clasped before her apron as she waits for them to go in. Hanging back, Will watches the dogs come up to Hannibal like he is their owner.

“Is okay,” says the woman kindly. “Dogs very friendly.”

At the encouraging sound of her voice, Will forces a polite smile in return before eyeing Hannibal who moves to sit down at a nearby table. As he steps in, the dogs immediately come his way and Will instinctively crouches down to greet them. The woman closes the gate behind him and goes to ask if Hannibal would like anything from the café menu. Having taken his order, she disappears behind a sliding door.

“Is this your idea of placating me?” Will mutters as he fusses the dogs.

“Do you feel placated?”

“No.”

“Should we leave?”

Will doesn’t respond.

“There are many animal cafes here in Tokyo,” says Hannibal. “I could have taken you to one full of puppies, but figured you would never leave.”

“At least I know if you do decide to abandon me, it’ll be at a nice place,” Will scoffs.

When Hannibal doesn’t immediately comment, he looks up to see hooded eyes watching down at him.

“Is that what you’re afraid of?” he asks quietly.

The sound of the door sliding open before the woman ventures back out gives Will a reason to straighten up without answering the question. As he does, he notices a third dog hiding in the small kitchen.

“His name is Winny,” says the woman, but Will cannot look away from the dog that bears such a close resemblance to Winston. Even the name seems too much of a coincidence.

“He looks like my friend’s dog,” Hannibal explains and the woman makes a sound of understanding.

“He was called Winston,” Will utters, crouching down again when he sees the animal begin tentatively to come out. “He was a stray.”

“My friend found him,” explains Hannibal. “By the road.”

Another sound of understanding.

“Then another one,” Hannibal continues to say. “This big.”

The woman makes a sound of surprise and Will glances over to see Hannibal holding out his arm, using his hand to mark the height of their Great Dane in the air. Exclaiming her disbelief in Japanese, the woman mimics the gesture and Hannibal smiles before exchanging some phrases that Will does not understand. The dog finally decides to come to him and he pets it while murmuring words of encouragement under his breath. It even looks at him the same way Winston used to.

“He is good friend.”

Realising he is being spoken to, Will looks at the woman with a hesitant smile. The front door opens and she excuses herself to see to the new visitors. Straightening up, Will walks to the table and sits down across from Hannibal. Winston’s twin follows and sits at his feet.

“What did you say?” he asks, petting the dog’s head while reaching for his coffee.

“That I brought you here because you miss your dog,” answers Hannibal, lifting the cup to his lips. After sipping, he lowers the cup, watching Will’s stroking hand. “She said it’s good of me to have done so. Said she believes pets can help to heal the soul. Said I’m a good friend, though I think you understood that part.”

Will meets that hooded gaze.

“How do you say actually he’s the devil?” he utters.

“Jitsuwa kare wa watashi no koibitodesu.”

Taking a sip, Will lowers the cup and eyes the other past its rim.

“I don’t think so,” he says.

“You understand what I’m saying?” says Hannibal, mildly impressed.

“No,” says Will flatly. “But I doubt it’s what I asked.”

The smile remains on Hannibal’s lips as he lifts the cup again.

“Protingas berniukas,” he murmurs.

Watching those lips parting to drink, Will lowers his eyes to the dog at his feet.

“Aš nesu kvailas, žinai,” he utters quietly as he strokes the animal’s head.

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The dogs were a nice distraction, he can’t deny that. But seeing Winston lookalikes did not remove the need to talk about the woman from the restaurant. They hadn’t formally introduced themselves because she must already know who they are. Yet, if Hannibal knows more than he is letting on, he hasn’t shared this information with Will. And this troubles him when he considers the last time Hannibal chose to withhold information because of his own prerogatives. To provoke Will into action instead of discussing his part with him and acting together as opposed to apart. On a good day, a voice will tell him Hannibal knew him well enough to have foreseen the end result. On a bad day, he tells that voice the man had merely honed his skills of manipulation. *Are we not past all that? How do you expect me to dabble alongside you in cannibal politics if I don’t know where I stand?*

When they’ve returned to the hotel, Will is ready to talk. Standing there with his hands on his hips, he watches Hannibal gathering his swimming things. Having waited all this time to have a private conversation with the man, the sight of him preoccupied makes Will shift his weight restlessly from one foot to the other.

“So for once you don’t want to talk,” he states, suddenly realising just how strange the idea is.

Stopping what he’s doing, Hannibal looks over.

“I’m always ready to listen to what you have to say, Will.”

His words are sincere, matching the earnest expression on his face. If Will has read correctly.

“Is it true what you left unsaid in the taxi,” Hannibal continues to say. “That you don’t know whether you can trust me?”

He speaks candidly, as though he is asking Will to reconsider his decision not to join him for dinner.

Brow knitting tighter, Will licks his lips before parting them.

“Did you say that because you were upset by what was said at the restaurant?” Hannibal speaks before he can, and Will continues to frown at him, arms folding.

“So you were aware of my…unease at the table,” says Will slowly, voice low and faintly accusatory.

Hannibal regards him for a moment. Then, putting the swimming things down on the edge of the bed, he slips his hands into the pockets of his trousers and walks up to stand beside Will, facing the other way. Looking askance, Will sees those hooded eyes calmly regarding the view outside. Watches those fair lashes lowering as he tilts his head so it leans away from him.

“I need you to believe in yourself with the same conviction as when you’d persuaded Matthew Brown to kill me,” he says eventually. Voice quiet and pensive. “Can you do that for me, Will.”

The unpleasant reminder serves simultaneously as a token of encouragement. A bitter shell encasing a sweet morsel of relief. It takes a moment to swallow before he walks away and squats down at his luggage. He feels Hannibal’s eyes on his back as he rifles through it. Then, straightening up with some clothes over his arm, he runs a hand through his hair before looking at the other’s swimming trunks on the bed.

“Come to the gym with me,” he says.

A pause, then Will looks up to meet that half drawn gaze. The man’s figure cutting an elegant shape against the backdrop of treetops and high rise buildings in the distance. Paris, Greece, Dubai, Tokyo. It doesn’t matter what skyline. What part of the world. As long as he’s not slipping underwater.

“As you wish,” says Hannibal.

++++

The gym is a busy hub of activity when they arrive. It’s not a huge space, but there is availability in the row of treadmills lined up before the floor to ceiling windows, through which the runners can watch the river and the East Gardens of the Imperial Palace stretching out into the distance.

Sat on a bench, Will does his usual set of bicep curls as he watches Hannibal running at high speed on the treadmill. He can hear the man panting a steady rhythm as a fine sheen of sweat builds on his long legs below the short shorts. A man gets on the treadmill beside him. Quickly gains pace. Will is about to look away when he notices him watching Hannibal. Becoming aware of the other’s gaze, Hannibal looks over. The man smiles and Hannibal smiles back before facing forward.

“That the fastest you can go?” says the man tauntingly.

“I like to pace myself,” pants Hannibal.

“One way to build stamina,” says the man.

Will feels his brow furrowing. His arm lifting the weight on autopilot as he listens to and watches the conversation.

“You here on business?” asks the man.

“Yes.”

“Same.”

A pause as the man catches his breath.

“How long you in town for?”

A touch on his shoulder makes him look from the pair to the girl standing at his side.

“You seemed lost in your own world, there,” she laughs, and Will realises she had been speaking to him but he hadn’t noticed.

“Sorry,” he says, smiling but wanting to get back to the conversation on the treadmills.

“Would you mind helping me out with something?” she asks, pulling an apologetic face.

“Sure.”

“Could you just watch and let me know if I’m doing these right?”

“Okay.”

“Thanks.”

Stood in a space near his bench, the girl faces him with her back and falls into her barbell squats. Her head is straight. Her shoulders are back. But there is too much of an arch in her spine.

“Try to keep your lower back more flat,” he says, and she looks back at him over her shoulder.

“Okay,” she says, facing forward again. The next squats remain the same.

“You’re still arching too much,” he says.

“Really?”

“’fraid so.”

The sound of breathless laughter makes him look over at the treadmills. Hannibal must have said something really funny.

“I’ll be right back,” says the girl, and Will faces her in time to see her tripping over the weight he’d put down. Lunging forward instinctively, he catches her as she falls. Feels her fingers gripping his biceps as he straightens up. “Oops,” she laughs, biting her bottom lip as she looks up at him with wide blinking eyes. Having recovered her footing, the girl walks off in the direction of the restrooms.

“John,” he hears Hannibal call, and, following the sound of his voice, sees the other looking back at him while he continues to run with his hands on the handrail. “My water bottle, please,” he pants, holding up a hand, and Will stops watching those parted lips and flushed cheekbones to bend over and pick up Hannibal’s water bottle. Instead of throwing it, however, he takes it over to him. Sees the man looking over as Will steps close enough to pass Hannibal the bottle.

“Is he not a good catch or are you a poor throw?” says the man in jest.

“I threw us off a cliff,” says Will flatly, meeting Hannibal’s eye as he sucks from the nozzle before turning and walking back to his bench.

Behind him, he hears Hannibal gasping for his breath after drinking.

“He likes to take risks in the business.”

“Ah.”

++++

In the men’s changing room, Will is sitting on a bench, towelling his hair. Soon he sees Hannibal’s bare feet and looks up to watch him walking out of the shower room with a towel wrapped around his hips. He steps over to stand beside Will.

“If you wish to use the room, I can take myself to the bar,” he says while opening the locker.

“What?” says Will, dragging the towel down onto his shoulders.

The man from the treadmill walks by, wearing just a towel. He makes eye contact with Hannibal and Will sees him nodding and grinning before continuing on his way.

“If you want to go to the bar, you only have to say,” he utters, watching after the man.

“I know.”

Standing up, Will turns around and opens the locker next to Hannibal's.

"As I was saying," the other begins to murmur, "if you wish to invite the girl back to the room, you only have to say."

"I know," says Will in echo of Hannibal's nonchalance.

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As they leave the changing rooms, dressed once more in smart attire, Will sees the girl from the gym and walks slower.

"Someone wants to have you for lunch," says Hannibal.

"What are you going to do about it?" says Will coolly as he steers them a different way.

"Have you both."

"Greedy."

"I enjoy a light antipasto," says Hannibal as they approach the menu board for the restaurant.

"Leave space for the main," Will utters.

"I always have space for the main."

He glances askance at the man's immaculate appearance. At the faint smile of amusement on those lips. Then drops his gaze to the menu.

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Eating on the rooftop takes Will back to Thessaloniki when they had watched the city from the top of a popular cocktail bar, but instead of the Aegean Sea, they now watch a sea of skyscrapers. Even up here, the rattan furniture is surrounded by miniature trees carefully placed and pruned to perfection. The disparity between nature and the metropolis cannot be emphasised enough by the sheer drop beyond the elegant foliage.

Although they came up here for the quiet, he cannot avoid the thoughts crowding inside his skull as he compares their current situation to the flirtation in Paris. The opera, a wedding, the crazy clubbing to a dog-led truffle hunt in sprawling Greek woodland and a dog café in the middle of a busy city. Mohamed's smirk to the woman's lofty expression. Hannibal weeping in his arms to the equivocal pep talk that cuts very much like a double-edged sword. The breeze is a reminder of their distance from the ground, but it has nothing to do with the dizzy spell he is experiencing.

"So what do we know so far," he asks after wiping his mouth on the napkin and reaching for his glass.

"Truffle and mushroom pasta is a common dish for tourists visiting Kalambaka," says Hannibal as he studies the last morsel on the end of his fork. "It doesn't necessarily mean the so-called brothers were watching us."

"But if they're working together, either way, she would have known," Will utters, taking a sip of his wine before lowering the glass, his eyes narrowing at the uneven skyline. "They had a mobile phone on them at the top of the Holy Trinity."

“And they took a photo of us with it.”

"You still have it?" Will asks, looking at the man sat beside him. Chewing, Hannibal puts down the fork and leans back. Reaching inside his suit jacket, he takes out a photograph and passes it over. Looking down at it, Will feels his frown deepening.

“This was in his notebook?” he asks, glancing up to see the other studying the photo with a tilted head.

“Yes.”

He pauses, wine still in hand. Slowly, he begins to lift it to his lips.

“You have it on you?” he utters into the glass, eyes averting.

“I do,” answers Hannibal. “Do you wish to see it?”

Swallowing, Will lowers the glass again.

“No.”

There is a pause during which he says nothing else and Hannibal puts the photo away before picking up his wine.

“What was their motive for showing Jack that photo?” says Will eventually.

“Curiosity, most likely. Turn up the heat and see how we’d respond.”

“They knew he was going to follow us to Dubai.”

“So it seems.”

“Mohamed knew Jack was coming.”

Slowly, Will looks at Hannibal from the corners of his eyes.

“Are they working together?” he continues to say. *Did you know?*

“Mohamed’s actions are driven by self-interest,” says Hannibal calmly. “We don’t know for sure whether he is working with these individuals.”

“Was Jack shipped off like that monk to her restaurant?” says Will lowly, ignoring the response and putting the glass down on the table with more force than intended. The small plate comes suddenly to the forefront of his mind. The strips of flesh. “Christ,” he utters, hanging his head and pressing a hand to his face.

“Even if that was the case, she would not have presented him in such a way.”

Lifting his head and lowering his hand, Will feels his face pinching at those words.

“What *way*?” he says irritably, looking at Hannibal who meets his glare briefly before turning his eyes on the view ahead.

“Without the correct emphasis,” he answers.

“To get a rise from us,” says Will quickly. *From me*. He scoffs derisively, shaking his head and hunching over his knees to run his hands over his face. “Unbelievable,” he utters with his eyes closed, voice muffled through his fingers. “And you’re-” He stops, dragging his hands down and opening his eyes until he sits there, hunched over with his fingers pressed to his mouth. As though to stop the wrong words from coming out. Or the vomit.

Hannibal doesn’t say anything, and slowly, Will lowers his hands and clasps them in front of him as he continues to sit there with his arms leaning atop his thighs. Swallowing, he licks his lips.

“Are you ever going to stop lying to me,” he says, voice a husky half whisper.

“I would be lying if I said I wasn’t curious to find out what she has in store for us,” says Hannibal. “I’m not lying when I say I don’t know Mohamed’s part in all of this.”

“You’re telling me you’ve never thought the bastard would go further than hurting your archaic sensibilities,” says Will scathingly, shooting a look his way, and although Hannibal keeps his eyes on the horizon, he knows he has struck a chord in him. The reminder of the man’s own shortcomings.

“Even if he is involved,” Hannibal finally says, lowering his lidded gaze to the glass in his hand, “he would not allow them to have the upper hand.” He lifts the glass absently towards his lips. “If he is playing a game, then he’s likely doing it to make us more dependent on his aid.”

Will falls back against the furniture, his hands once more pressing to his face.

“This is insane,” he half groans, half mumbles through his fingers, “why are we doing this.”

When no response is given, Will leans his head back against the rattan. Drops his hands limply in his lap.

“Even if you’re right,” he utters, “what game are *we* playing? Because it sure as hell feels like he’s got our balls in one hand.”

“Do you know what Hecate told her minions in Macbeth,” says Hannibal.

“Who the fuck is Hecate.”

“She told them they would make Macbeth spurn fate, scorn death, and bear his hopes above wisdom, grace and fear,” explains Hannibal. “And you all know,” he goes on to quote, “security is mortals’ chiefest enemy.”

“And what the fuck does that mean.”

“Overconfidence leads to one’s downfall,” says Hannibal patiently. “We will win any game against Mohamed if we continue to feed his ego.”

Exhaling, Will slowly looks askance to watch the other gazing pensively at the floor. Turns his half drawn eyes back to the gently rustling foliage in front of them. For a while, they just sit there in silence, feeling the cool breeze sifting like soothing fingers through their hair where no other comfort can be found.

“Do you know what Macbeth told his wife after he ordered the murder of his friend?” Will utters quietly.

“Tell me,” says Hannibal.

“Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,” quotes Will, “till thou applaud the deed.” Sighing, he adds in a quiet voice, “And do you know how she died?” He pauses before adding, “Offstage and alone.”

“I would kill you myself than have you face such a fate,” says Hannibal.

“Is that supposed to make me feel better.”

“Some might call it romantic.”

“Promise me you won’t keep me in the dark again,” Will murmurs, staring ahead. He feels Hannibal watching him and turns his face to frown at that veiled expression. Cheek pressing against the upholstery, Will doesn’t look away when he utters “Prašau” as that dark gaze continues to regard him through the lashes.

The sound of voices makes Will break eye contact and look down the platform to the couple stood at the bottom of the steps. As they climb further, he sits up to observe them busying themselves finding the best angle from which to take a photo.

“I’ll promise if you take a selfie with me.”

Will feels his face pinching.

“Come again.”

“Take a photo with me,” he says, and Will looks over to see Hannibal putting his hand in his trouser pocket.

“What are you going to do with it,” he utters warily, watching the man pull out his phone.

“Nothing.”

Hannibal looks at him innocently, unperturbed by his grimace.

“I promise,” he adds, smiling. When Will continues to sit there, unmoving and unmoved, Hannibal tilts his head and lowers his lashes at him. Parts his lips and says “Prašau” the way Will did, and yet different in tone. Lower. Smoother. Like the touch of a hand on his leg. And Will remains unmoving as Hannibal leans close. His thigh pressing against Will’s. Their heads just short of making contact as one smiles and the other frowns.

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

“Jitsuwa kare wa watashi no koibitodesu” – “Actually, he is my lover.”
“Protingas berniukas” – “Clever boy.”
“Aš nesu kvailas, žinai” – “I’m not stupid, you know.”
“Prašau” – “Please.”

Rusty Nail

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They are just walking into the room when the phone rings. Exchanging a quick glance with Hannibal, Will walks over to the desk. Picks up the receiver and holds it to his ear.

“Hello,” he says, watching Hannibal standing across from him with his hands in his trouser pockets.

“Good afternoon, Mr Graham.”

Despite himself, Will swallows compulsively at the intimidating richness of her voice.

“I find myself sitting in your hotel bar,” she continues to say whimsically. “Perhaps you may come down and join me.” The briefest pause before she adds, “Alone.”

Unable to hear her request, Hannibal continues to watch on with an inquisitive expression on his face. Taking both encouragement and inspiration from that self-possession projecting so naturally from the man, Will inhales slowly, giving himself time to think.

“If you have something to say, you can say it in front of both of us,” he states.

During the pause, he can imagine those red lips lifting amusedly.

“Very well,” she says. And ends the call.

Putting down the receiver, Will folds his arms.

“We have company,” he says flatly, holding that curious gaze. “She wanted to talk to me.”

“Does the thought of being alone with her make you uncomfortable?” asks Hannibal.

“Since you enjoy watching her make me squirm, I thought to extend the invite,” drawls Will drily.

“I enjoy waiting,” corrects Hannibal. “There is a difference.”

“Yeah,” Will scoffs, pacing towards the window. “She might not.”

In his peripheral vision, he sees Hannibal walking up to the window until they are standing abreast.

“Is she on her way?”

“She’s already here.”

“Shall we venture down, then? It is rude to keep a lady waiting after all.”

“Yes, alright. Keep it in your pants,” Will mutters. “I’m thinking.”

“You believe me to be sexually aroused by our new acquaintance,” says Hannibal.

Will does not comment as he continues to frown out the window.

“Yet I don’t recall taking my penis to the negotiation table,” the man continues to say.

“Why are we still talking about your-”

“I was referring to the time you played bad cop with Daniyal.”

Pause.

“It gave you pleasure, did it not, toying with the prey whilst fanning that tail of scornful self-righteousness.”

“I’m not a peacock.”

“Whenever a male peacock shakes its tail, it creates a pressure wave that rattles the female’s head for attention.”

“I’m not looking for a mate,” he says, looking askance at the other to find hooded eyes looking back.

There is a knock on the door. Hannibal holds his gaze a beat longer before walking away, leaving Will to answer. Taking the handle with a firm grasp, he pulls open the door whilst straightening his back. Lifts his chin a notch to regard their visitor through half drawn eyes.

“Mr Graham,” she says in greeting. “We meet again.”

Wearing a beige collared coat and her tresses teased into a flawless fifties do, the woman looks every inch as immaculate as she had been on their last meet. The only hair out of place belongs to the red and white Japanese Chin in her arms as it wags its white plume of a tail excitedly upon seeing Will. Shifting the animal in her arms, she reaches up with a manicured hand to remove the sunglasses from her face.

“Are you going to invite me in?” she asks lowly with a smile, fixing Will with her piercing grey stare.

Instead of answering, he steps back, holding the door open as she walks inside. Whilst pushing the door shut, he watches that blonde head looking around the room.

“May I interest you in a drink?”

Having busied himself pouring wine, Hannibal walks towards them with a glass of red in each hand.

“You may,” she says, turning her face towards Will. “Would you be so kind?”

He receives the dog handed to him and stands there as she takes off her coat and drapes it over the back of the chaise lounge before sitting down. Hannibal offers her one of the glasses and looks towards Will as he steps closer. Shaking his head at the remaining glass, Will returns his attention to the woman sitting poised on the furniture in her red pussy bow blouse and fitted tweed trousers as Hannibal takes a seat in the chair opposite.

“Why are you here?” he asks before the edge of the glass reaches her lips, knowing they could easily spend an hour pussyfooting around the question.

“You beat me to the question, Mr Graham,” she says, unfazed by his forwardness as she watches Hannibal. “I would very much like to know what it is that makes you stay.” Grey remain fixed on black as she takes a sip of her wine, and Will resists the urge to click his fingers to remind them who she had originally come to see.

“He is my friend,” says Hannibal, the simplicity of the sentence being emphasised by Will’s hesitation at the unexpected interruption.

“Ah,” she says with a knowing smile. “Yet even friends need a break from one another eventually.”

“He makes a good travel companion,” says Hannibal, smiling in return.

“Indeed,” she says, lifting her eyes at Will and taking another sip from the glass. “Should I ever become in need of my own, I would want someone with whom I can revel in the same passions and interests, not someone who could pose a hindrance to my experiences.” Lowering her glass, she gives Will a blatant onceover as she continues to speak. “I believe such a requirement to be the bare minimum in a companion, don’t you agree?”

“You know nothing about me,” Will utters, and the woman smiles dismissively before turning back to Hannibal.

“I’ve come today to share some rather exciting news with you,” she begins to say, as though speaking to Will had been the preliminary. “It appears the works of our artists have gained increasing attention from The Establishment with whom all previous accomplishments are duly recognised and acknowledged as being quintessential of the esteemed realm of the culinary arts as they know it.”

“By works, you mean murders,” says Will.

“I’m not here to debate the ethics of eating meat,” she says lightly.

“And I’m not talking about vegetarianism,” he retorts.

“Oh good, since I find that topic utterly tasteless,” she says idly.

“But not the vegetarian.”

The woman tilts her head at Hannibal’s casual remark. Her lips tugging minutely at the corners. Walking over, Will drops the dog in the man’s lap and plucks the glass from his fingers before spearing him a glance from the corners of his eyes that says, *Really?*

“You were saying,” he utters, taking an impatient sip and diverting his eyes to her amused expression from the opposite crossing Hannibal’s face as the dog makes itself comfortable.

“As you may or may not know, Mr Graham,” she continues to say, obliging yet critical in her manner. “The Establishment consists of a circle of the influential. Once you are in, the world, as they say, is your oyster. All you have to do is impress them.”

The opposite of this being an easy feat, however, is suggested by the lofting of her shapely eyebrows, and, swallowing a generous mouthful of wine, Will hums, pretending to consider the offer being lauded to Hannibal and posed as a glass ceiling for anyone else.

“Never did like oysters much,” he says, wrinkling his nose.

“Ah,” she says again, the interjection reaching Will’s ears as a condescending attempt to undermine him. “Yet what I’m about to announce may whet even a palate as obtuse as yours.”

“Is that right?” says Will with a lofting of his brows.

“I believe so,” she says simply, watching him unwaveringly as she lifts the glass. “May I continue?”

“Please,” he answers through his teeth.

“Should the masters decide to respond to Truth Unveiled by Time *Revisited*, I have the honour of making available to them one most coveted ingredient,” she says, voice lowering an octave.

Will watches her watching Hannibal. Watches Hannibal watching her back.

“We wish to learn more of said ingredient,” says Hannibal without hesitation. “And the nature of The Establishment’s interest in the artists.”

“Excellent,” she exclaims smilingly. “Join me tomorrow morning and I shall give you a private tour of my business.”

“We look forward to it,” says Will flatly.

“Glad to hear it,” she says, turning that triumphant countenance his way. “Now, I do believe it is time for Han and I to be on our way.”

As she stands to put on her coat, so does Hannibal, carrying the dog in his hands.

“We shall see you out,” the man says, and a retort of *the window* flits across Will’s mind followed by a rather vivid imagining of said retort inspired by the sight of their fingers brushing as the dog is passed back to its owner. The hushed murmur of *good boy* is uttered against the Chin’s head, but her grey eyes linger on Hannibal.

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As soon as the taxi has pulled away, Will exhales and walks back into the hotel lobby, leaving Hannibal watching after the vehicle. When it has disappeared into the distance, he heads back in and follows his instincts to the bar.

He finds Will sat in one of the barstools as he waits for the bartender to make his drink. The man from the gym is also here, sat at one of the side tables. He looks up from his laptop as Hannibal approaches and greets him jovially. They exchange a few pleasantries before he continues on his way to the bar.

After agreeing to the bartender’s choice of a red wine, he settles back against the barstool. Turns his face to study the near empty tumbler in Will’s hand.

“What are you drinking?” he asks.

“Rusty nail.”

The bartender puts a glass down in front of him and Hannibal thanks the man before lifting it to his nose. After considering its notes, he takes a sip and smiles his approval at the other who returns the gesture with a polite nod.

“I never thought I’d say this,” Will begins to utter, and Hannibal lowers the glass upon the reflective surface of the bar. Instead of continuing, however, Will drains the remainder of his drink and asks for another. Hannibal takes another sip of his wine.

“I wish we were back in Paris,” says Will eventually.

Watching the other sitting there, nursing his tumbler, Hannibal tilts his head.

“You mean to say you miss her,” he says shrewdly.

“Better the devil you know,” Will murmurs into his glass. “Plus her jokes can’t be as bad as yours.”

“I thought it was rather amusing,” he says, thinking back to the conversation.

“As did she.”

At the sound of contempt in his voice, Hannibal turns his eyes on the bottles lining the shelf.

“It was beginning to sound like an argument,” he explains.

“So you intervened because you thought I would lose,” Will scoffs.

“I intervened because you were making a target of yourself.”

“Thanks. Next time I’ll stand there quietly while the both of you throw darts at my head.”

“I understand you are feeling-”

“Or take the dog for a walk while the adults talk and fuck each other-”

“Now you’re being crude.”

“I’m being crude,” Will laughs unpleasantly, setting down the tumbler. “I guess I lack the rhetoric,” he says, looking apathetically at Hannibal. “Maybe you should go back and talk to him,” he adds, looking over his shoulder at the man sat at the table. “I’m done talking,” he says, facing forward and lifting the tumbler before knocking it back.

“I think you’ve had enough,” says Hannibal.

“Yeah.”

Blue eyes regard him impassively.

“Of you.”

He holds that gaze until Will looks away and they sit there drinking in silence until he has finished his wine. Then he gets up and leaves Will to it.

Not long after, he receives a call from reception regrettably informing him of his friend’s intoxication and refusal to leave the bar. Heading down, he returns to find Will slumped over the bar top with his head in his arms as the bartender sees to other guests. Catching the man’s eye as he approaches, he apologises before taking a firm hold of Will and, ignoring the groans of protest, half dragging him off the barstool, out of the bar, and into the elevator. Inside, Will attempts to shove him off. The first time, Hannibal maintains his grip, but when Will gets aggressive, he releases his hold on him and lets the man fall. As they reach their floor and the doors slide open, he leans down to grab and pull Will into a stand before hauling him down the corridor.

Dropping Will onto the bed, he walks off to the minibar whilst straightening up his garments. Behind him, the man begins to mumble a string of semi coherent imperatives.

“Go. Have your tour.”

Opening the refrigerator, he takes out a bottle of water.

“Enjoy eating each other. Don’t forget the marinade. Tasted like shit.”

Twisting open the lid, he pours half the bottle into a glass and leaves it on the side as he makes his way over.

“Do you still think of my brains, Doctor Lecter?” Will continues to drawl drunkenly at the ceiling. As he nears, those half drawn eyes come down to stare blandly at him. “Whose do you think tastes better?”

Looking down at the other from the foot of the bed, Hannibal tilts his head.

“Not yours,” he answers.

Heavy brows draw together.

“Why.”

“It probably tastes of rusty nails,” he says mildly.

That disgruntled countenance relaxes into one of calm defiance.

“You taste of a rusty trombone,” he drawls.

“I’m afraid I’m not familiar with that one,” says Hannibal patiently.

“Yes you are.”

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, he holds the glass towards the other. After Will pushes it away a second time with enough force to send the water sloshing out of the glass, Hannibal gets up and puts the glass aside.

“Everyone loves Hannibal Lecter,” Will continues to drawl, elongating the first vowel in *love*. “Who did it first? Bedelia. Did you ask Alana to after you stole her from me?”

Returning to stand over the man, Hannibal grabs the front of Will’s suit jacket and attempts to wrestle him out of it as he continues to talk.

“Did you ask her to stick it up your ass?”

Tossing the freed garment onto the chaise lounge, he shoves at Will’s chest. Falling onto his back with a grunt, he carries on while Hannibal takes off his shoes.

“Mohamed would. Eat the sun straight out that hole it’s shining from,” he slurs. “But there’s no sun there.”

“Are you done?” Hannibal exhales, chucking the shoes aside and straightening up.

“Just a big, gaping-”

“Clearly not,” he says, taking off his own suit jacket.

“No,” Will mutters, watching up at him through lidded eyes. “No sex. Makes you cry. Like a baby.”

“A baby,” repeats Hannibal with a lofting of his brows.

“A big ass baby,” Will mumbles, eyes slipping almost to a close.

“Tu esi neįmanoma,” he utters under his breath as he walks to the bathroom.

When he comes back out, Will is lying on the bed in the same state as he’d left him. Eyes closed. Lips faintly parted. Snoring somewhat loudly. Climbing onto the bed, he drags Will more fully onto the cover. Leaning back, he stares down at that sleeping face. Observes the way that obstinate curl obscures the mark of unfinished business - the blade interrupted mid-rotation - and lids his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:

“Tu esi neįmanoma” - You are impossible

Esterre

Chapter Notes

The night he slipped into Hannibal's room at Mohamed's, he had been terrified by what haunted him in his sleep. The fear had driven him to seek comfort in Hannibal's body because he hadn't wanted to talk about what he saw or what it all meant. He knew what it meant. Instead, he had sought physical reassurance, willing or unwillingly, from the other because he knew that was real. Flesh and blood beneath his hands. It didn't matter if Hannibal had been asleep or awake. He hadn't stirred at the time. Not even when Will had touched him in the most invasive of ways. And Will had preferred this. Because while he holds himself to blame, so much of the dark inspiration continues to be spun by Hannibal. That, paired with the absence of a remedy for the constant guilt and regret that ebbs and flows within him as steady as the act of respiration itself, makes him turn without fail to the only thing that could ever be acceptable. Could ever come close to being enough.

And Will finds himself dreaming about it again. Hannibal lying on his front upon the bed. The weight of his buttocks in his palms. The way they spread beneath his fingers. The way his body yields to him, which in itself is the subject of envy, as Will had learned following Mohamed's disclosure. It makes him lave harder at Hannibal, as though chiselling his claim with the blunt muscle of his tongue. Upon pushing deeper, however, the grounding presence disappears, and Will stumbles down into the arms of the girl he had taken back to the hotel room in Thessaloniki. Almost falls into the gaping black hole that is her face. Breath catching, he scrambles back and off the bed as she lies there, stripped of her identity. And yet he can't help looking at her naked chest and the locket that lies open upon it. At the tiny photograph of a smiling child. As he backs from the bed, she begins to sit up, blood flowing and spilling from the depthless cavity the same time her hands and feet ignite.

Taking another step back under that faceless stare, he finds himself venturing past the threshold connecting his room with Hannibal's, and turns around to see Jack lying fully clothed on a dining table. His eyes bulging from their sockets. Unblinking and unfeeling as the carving knife sinks through the meat of his thigh, the blade reflecting the glare of the chandelier above as it travels its way with a smooth sawing motion down to the bone. Sensing him stood at the doorway, she looks up and smiles amusedly as she frees the piece of flesh with her fingers and holds it above the little dog rearing on its hind legs against her. Its white plume of a tail whipping back and forth excitedly.

Then Hannibal strolls into view, and Will suddenly finds himself watching down at him from a height. That chin lifting as those hooded eyes look up at him, their black depths recognising and unrecognising. Will can't speak and nor can he move as Hannibal tilts his head and continues to regard him with the curiosity of one faced with a distorted piece of art.

"Truth unveiled by time," he says, accented voice thoughtful and quiet as he smiles up at Will. His impassive face begins to soften with fondness as he meets his gaze. Thus distracted, he doesn't notice her approaching him from behind with the carving knife as the Chin stands watching on. It licks at the red muzzle of its face while staring vacantly at Will. And that is all he can do as she nears Hannibal. Stare. And do nothing.

++++

Will had been lying upon the covers lost to his usual battles as Hannibal sat beside him with the tablet. It never grows tiresome, watching the man struggle. Listening to his mumbles of bubbling terror and pain relived. When, in a fit of panic, Will rolls away from Hannibal, he drops the tablet to grab onto his twitching body and drag him back from the edge. Back hitting the cover, the man cries out with returning lucidity and Hannibal feels those clammy hands on his arms. Pushing and fighting him as he wrestles from the grip of his nightmare. Used to this, Hannibal embraces the bellicosity as though it were his own. Finding anything other than turmoil in his arms is less expected, but not unwelcome, and when he feels Will cowering with his arms wrapped around himself, the hard dig of a slick brow against his collarbone, he says nothing. Merely retains his grip on those bunching biceps lest the man suddenly decides to throw himself over again.

When Will wakes, he pushes instinctively against his chest with both confusion and embarrassment, and Hannibal resumes his position, sitting against the headboard with his legs stretched out before him and crossed at the ankles. While the other drags himself up into a sit, he smooths the rumples in his own shirt before picking up the tablet.

"How are you feeling?" he asks, turning his face to regard that morose expression.

Hunched over, Will runs a hand over his face.

"My head is pounding," he utters lowly.

"Must be all those rusty nails you hammered it with," says Hannibal mildly as he puts the tablet down on the bedside table and moves off the bed. Retrieving a packet of medication from his luggage, he walks round and chucks it into his lap. Taking another gulp from his glass of water, Will pauses to pick up the box.

"You should freshen up before dinner," says Hannibal, watching him contemplate the writing on the packaging. "You will feel better after having something to eat." Tilting his head, he adds after a pause, "One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well." When those blue eyes look up tiredly, Hannibal smiles. "Virginia Woolf," he says.

++++

To reach the entrance of the restaurant, they have to travel down a dim passage lit by low spotlighting. Standing in the open space of the lobby, Will looks to the bottom of that corridor at the beige sculpture. Composed of carefully arranged vegetables, all of the same colour, it reminds him of some kind of deity. Squint a little and the suspended objects look like skulls being juggled.

“The restaurant is designed by award-winning interior designer, Shinichiro Ogata,” says Hannibal from beside him. “The earthy palette and choice of materials were chosen to emphasise the harmony between nature and humans.”

The talk of palettes reminds Will of the human mural. Another case from the past.

“There is no such thing as harmony,” he says cynically, recalling the vision of being stitched to the body lying beside him. “Just missing brushstrokes.”

There is no immediate response as Hannibal appears to contemplate his words.

“What did you make with his leg?” he asks casually as he stands there with his hands in his trouser pockets, watching the tunnel-like corridor ahead. The outside walls of the restaurant have been wrapped in what appears to be textured paper, the creases built into the layering giving the surface an illusion of fluidity. They remind Will of falling sand, and he inevitably likens the act of entering the passage to walking into a trap.

“Osso bucco,” answers Hannibal after a pause. “Although Esterre is known for putting particular emphasis on earthy ingredients such as grains, vegetables and fruits.”

“I saw you in that granary,” says Will with the false nonchalance of one telling an anecdote in hindsight and without dwelling overlong on the barbed details.

“I saw you too,” says Hannibal, and Will glances over to see the other smiling amiably. “Now,” the man adds, stirring himself with relish on the spot, “how about we see ourselves inside the restaurant.”

++++

He knew from the name that they would be sitting down to French cuisine. Had suspected the designer chairs resembling pebbles and littering the space of the restaurant like aesthetically placed cairns to be more style over comfort, and is glad to find that is not the case. But it will take more than expensive furniture to encourage him to remain here longer than he needs to.

“What is…hira-suzuki,” he utters, brow knitting at the menu.

“Japanese sea bass.”

“And…botan-ebi.”

“Pandalus nipponensis.”

Will lifts his eyes to stare flatly at the man sitting across the small table looking elegant and self-satisfied as he peruses the same menu with the finesse of one accustomed to reading the names of unfamiliar ingredients while actually knowing what they are.

“Also known as Japanese shrimp,” says Hannibal.

Returning his attention to the words, Will hones in on something familiar.

“Lamb from Hokkaido,” he reads aloud.

“Raised on asparagus.”

“Someone’s done their homework,” he says drily.

“Less than one percent of lamb and mutton in Japan is produced domestically,” Hannibal states in a tone that suggests he has shared a common piece of knowledge.

“What are you having?”

“Guess.”

Scoffing under his breath, Will glances at Hannibal over the top of his menu before dropping his eyes to search for the most pretentious sounding thing he can find.

“Red tuna from Aomori with kohlrabi, artemisia and blood orange.”

“What made you choose that main in particular?” asks Hannibal curiously.

“Artemisia sounds like a brain disorder.”

“You suspect me of having one?”

“Maybe. I know you like to induce them in others.”

“A form of artemisia is used in the brewing of remedies against hangovers and nightmares,” says Hannibal thoughtfully as he disregards Will’s comment.

A pause before the man adds, “Do you find yourself in need of such a remedy?”

The image of the woman peeling a piece of Jack’s thigh to feed her dog returns to the forefront of Will’s mind.

“Can’t say I believe much in remedies,” he says quietly.

“What do you believe in,” says Hannibal.

“Temporary alleviation, at best.”

“In what manner.”

Will looks up to see Hannibal pretending to read his menu.

“Consensual,” he says blandly.

A waiter approaches them and asks if they are ready to order. He looks at Will, so he answers, “Yes, please.” After taking their order, the man smiles politely before moving away, and Will sits back in his chair to watch Hannibal lifting his wineglass.

“There are different ways to give consent,” he says mildly as he scents the notes of the wine.

“Spoken like a true rapist,” Will mutters under his breath with a glance around them.

“In fact,” says Hannibal, face turning to the side, “I don’t believe I have ever said yes please.”

“Shocking,” says Will, bringing the wine to his lips. “Considering you are so-”

“Anally retentive?”

He swallows a bit too quickly. Gulping loud.

“…pedantic was the word I was going for,” he utters upon his recovery.

“Ah.”

Following the other’s gaze, Will looks out the floor-to-ceiling windows at the red and white flow of vehicles traversing up and down the boulevard. The horizon blocked by high rise buildings standing together in uneven rank. Their countless windows aglow in the distance like pillars of caged stars in the dark.

“Tell me about your nightmares,” says Hannibal in a voice that echoes the old promise of doctor-patient confidentiality.

“They’re nightmares,” says Will disinterestedly, keeping his eyes on the view.

“You are having trouble sleeping.”

“No more than usual.”

“Are you sure?”

“Why? Do I look like shit?” Will scoffs softly, looking at the man. Then away again. “I’ll sleep when it’s all over,” he continues to say, watching the night beyond the glass. The past catches up again, however, and a conversation he’d had with Alana years ago resurfaces. It had taken place just before his last dinner with Hannibal and, unwilling to subject his current state of mind to the other’s analysis, he chooses instead to share a memory rather than give nothing at all.

“Alana once told me she could barely sleep,” he begins quietly to recount as his mind conjures up her worried expression and superimposes it against the urban glow of the city. “Her mind was swarming with nightmares,” he continues to say. “Surrounded by a darkness she could not escape. Said she felt poisoned.”

“And what did you say?” Hannibal asks mildly.

“That we’re all poisoned,” he answers, unable quite to stop the flinch that always accompanies the memory of what could have been, had he believed in an alternative. That, just as Alana had suspected, there were traps on both sides, and he had been too dogged in his belief – his claim, rather – that there was no stopping what had been put into motion. And years later, the same had made him throw them over. A mistake, he now knows. Thinks his knows. *And yet…* Swallowing a sudden wave of anxiety, he turns his eyes to the table. *Now it is you who appears to be doing the same.*

++++

Studying Will’s face, he detects a beginning tremor in the surface of the water. Recognises with a degree of discomfort that he cannot seem to disconnect himself from the man’s unease. The past leaves its constant reverberations through Will, and Hannibal finds himself reminded of it every time he looks at him. Normally this doesn’t cause him too much grief if handled correctly. But tonight,

with his heart set on enjoying an elegant meal in the other's company, he doesn't wish to dwell on the bitterness of betrayal. Finds himself resenting, almost, the inevitable return to an old episode that never fails to gall and gut him as deeply as Will had been physically. Lowering his own gaze, he strokes absently at the stem of his wine glass.

"Do you know what fugu is?" he asks. "It is the name of a Japanese delicacy," he says without waiting for a response. "The preparation and eating of blowfish."

"Deadly if not prepared correctly," says Will.

"Indeed," he says, lifting his eyes to that furrowed brow. "Chefs wishing to serve fugu require authorisation from the government. This is because the toxin found in blowfish is deadlier than arsenic or cyanide. In its purest form, a dosage of as little as two milligrams is enough to kill an adult human."

He watches the lofting of his brows. The slow, thoughtful blink as the information is digested.

"I guess we ought to be grateful you never served us fugu," says Will eventually, the lightness of tone reaching Hannibal like a belated umbrella moving to shield him from the downpour upon the night to mark all nights. Perhaps for the rest of their lives. Yet the air is made the lighter by the man's willingness to work together to dispel the clouds of the past, even for a short while.

"Or penis."

That grimace again that's also a smile of exaggerated disgust.

"It's notoriously tough," Hannibal continues to say.

"You've said," the man chuckles despite himself as he picks up his glass and looks around them.

"It would take a significant degree of culinary genius-"

"To turn it into a gastronomical delight," Will interrupts to finish the self-reference before touching the rim to his lips. "Glad to know dick is off the menu," he utters under his breath with a sideways glance.

"Are you?"

Blue eyes travel back to him.

"…am I what," he says into the glass, and Hannibal can read the words scrolling through his mind: *Off the menu?*

"Glad," he says simply, enjoying the way Will knits his brows and presses his lips together as the suggestion catches up with him. Lewd and without the usual margin for misinterpretation. The waiter ventures over with their order, however, and Hannibal holds that look – the old Will Graham *I don't know what you're talking about* look – and maintains his smile as the man makes a point of diverting his attention to the dishes being lowered to the table.

++++

The lamb is cooked to perfection. And yet he finds he cannot taste it so well with the voices in his head.

We could disappear now. Tonight.

Across him, Hannibal appears to be enjoying each bite. His hooded eyes downcast as he consumes the aesthetics of the dish with his gaze.

That'd make this our last supper.

He chews a little slower, reading the delight in that normally impassive countenance.

Of this life. I am serving lamb.

Sacrificial? Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

I freely claim my sin. I don't need a sacrifice.

He stops altogether, unable to bring himself to swallow the piece of meat.

Do you?

Sensing his hesitation, Hannibal looks up.

"Is something wrong?"

At the question, Will stares searchingly at the table as though he has dropped his words amongst their plates and cutlery. Swallowing, he opens his mouth. Looks up again at Hannibal.

I…

"We just keep bumping into one another."

Turning his face at the voice, Will sees the guy from the gym. Faces the front again as the man nears with a waft of cologne and rests his hand on the back of Will's chair.

"Funny thing about staying in the same hotel," he utters flatly, forking a piece of vegetable – he forgets what it's called – into his mouth.

The man laughs off Will's sarcasm.

"Is he always like this?" he asks playfully.

"Pretty much."

Glancing up at Hannibal's amused smile, Will resists the urge to challenge it with a non too accidental kick to the shin.

"So where are you boys heading tonight after dinner?"

In his peripheral vision, Will sees the man sitting down at the table beside theirs.

"Can't come to Tokyo and not see what all the fuss is about," he continues to say. "My lot have managed to get a table at Villa, if you're interested."

"Thanks, but we have an early start," says Will without looking up from his plate.

“So have we, but it’s nothing a few Red Bulls won’t fix,” the man chuckles. “If you change your mind, the table’s booked for eleven.”

“We appreciate the invite,” says Hannibal.

“The more the merrier,” says the man, and Will glances askance in time to catch him winking at Hannibal. Averting his eyes, he pushes another piece of food into his mouth.

++++

As soon as the elevator doors have slid to a close, and they are standing alone inside the confined space, Will tucks his hands into his trouser pockets.

“Well he’s keen,” he says snidely.

“Looking for help to foot the bill, most likely.”

“I don’t know,” says Will lightly as he watches their distorted reflection in the elevator doors. “Seemed pretty friendly at the gym.”

The elevator reaches their floor and the doors slide open again.

“Are you worried I’ll end up drugged and lying on my stomach in a love motel,” says Hannibal as they walk out and down the empty corridor towards their room.

“Wouldn’t be the first time,” says Will, thinking of the video.

“But I wasn’t drugged,” says Hannibal.

“No, of course not. You had to stay lucid after letting him fuck you.”

Despite being calmly spoken, his words reveal their edge nonetheless, and he wishes he had more control of his scorn as they come to a stop in front of the door while a young couple walks towards them. They smile amiably at Will on passing as Hannibal gets out the card key – the female looking a touch longer than necessary. The smile he returns is only a beat delayed, and by then the door is open and he’s following in after Hannibal.

++++

“Are you sure you do not want to go out?”

Behind him, Will hears the other stepping out onto the balcony, but keeps his eyes on the distant line of buildings hemming them in on all sides. Lifting the can to his lips, he takes another sip of his beer while Hannibal steps up to the glass panelling and folds his arms upon the steel. Will watches his profile. The spikes of his hair stirring in the night breeze above that dark gaze. There is a faint smile on his lips, as though he is reading into the limitless possibilities of an evening spent in downtown Tokyo. Facing ahead, Will drinks from the can and stands there motionless as he leans against the rail, wondering what lies beyond the repressive skyline. After a while, he glances to the empty balconies on either side of them. Takes note of the absence of noise from both above and below, indicating there is no one else within earshot. He pulls his arm in as though to brace, pressing the bottom of the can to the cold metal.

“Leave with me,” he says before he changes his mind.

The pause comes, as expected, and Will doesn't know what he plans to answer with should the other ask him about the logistics.

"Do you remember that night, when I said we could disappear," Hannibal slowly begins to say with a strange hollowness in his voice, as though he is recounting against his own wishes, and it makes Will glad his arms are folded upon the rail. A grounding touch to see him through the clinical incisions should they continue with their dissection of the past. "You told me Jack wanted to see who I was and what you had become. To know the truth. And I'd replied, to the truth, then. And all its consequences."

Making himself look over, Will sees a wall and doesn't know whether he ought to be attempting to scale it or taking cover from impending arrows.

"You said you never underestimated me," he says quietly. Unarmed as he walks up to the fortress.

"Are you questioning my conviction?"

That face turns to look at him. Unable to read it, Will swallows and carefully removes the first brick of his own wall.

"It feels less like a vote of confidence and more just waiting for her to prove she's right," he slowly begins to say.

"All the more reason to prove she's not."

Frowning at the casual tone of Hannibal's voice, Will presses his lips together under that inscrutable gaze.

"Since when was this about proving myself to egotistical assholes," he says evenly as he straightens up, holding that stare. *You want to hear me admit that yes, I feel out of my depth with these people and their games, and not knowing if I'll be able to protect us if anything happens?*

Hooded eyes leave him to look towards the horizon.

"Since you met me," says Hannibal lightly. "But if you no longer wish to ravage the kingdom's inhabitants, you are free to go back to your Andromeda and live under the rock you are chained to for the rest of your days."

Will closes his eyes as he's left standing alone at the railing. *Always this*.

"You speak so grandly of punishing the hubris of others," he says lowly, opening his eyes to watch Hannibal's back as the man stops a step from re-entering the room. "But what about yours?"

He turns his face to the side, and Will is reminded of the sharp edges in that profile.

"Is it not in poor enough taste to flaunt your own lack of confidence that you now question the competence of others?" he says, tilting his head so almost all of his profile moves out of view. "I sometimes wonder whether I should have chosen my words more carefully when I whispered through the chrysalis. But I suppose it makes little difference when the imago emerges deaf and blind."

Jaw flexing at the words, Will does not trust himself to speak as he watches Hannibal step into the room and continue on his way to the door. Shoving his hands into his trouser pockets, he turns to stare perplexedly at the horizon blocked by high rise buildings. *It's not that you're incompetent*. Behind him, he hears the door opening. *But that your competence is being compromised*. At the sound of it

closing, he looks over his shoulder at the empty room. Lowers his gaze. *By your feelings for me*. And closes his eyes.

Tower of Babel

Chapter Notes

> Chapter intended to be read to the Marcus Joseph Trap Remix of 'The Heart Wants What It Wants' by Selena Gomez: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0e9MNNcDXZ4

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Not long after Hannibal left, Will had changed, neatened himself up, and headed down to the taxi rank. The club, it turns out, is only a ten minute drive from the hotel. Judging by the line of people standing outside of the high rise building, it will take him far longer to get into the actual venue. He is glad to see he is not the only foreigner joining the queue. If anything, it will be his lack of company that makes him conspicuous to the local majority. The sound of high spirited chatter and phone cameras going off both in front and behind him, however, suggests most are too preoccupied to take special note of his presence. Standing with his arms folded at the rear of the line, he looks up at the building and realises its façade is covered top to bottom in foliage. The electric glow from the club sign and entrance lighting illuminates the shifting of real leaves in the night breeze. Yet more urban greening breathing air into narrow streets crowded on all sides by skyscrapers. As the queue moves, it brings him closer to the white hot letters nestled in the wall of green: *Vabel*. And he wonders if Hannibal had also been reminded of the Tower of Babel and the act of God punishing mankind by making it impossible for them to understand one another. Watching the people up front preparing to move forward, he feels relieved, nevertheless, to be scattered around the world together as opposed to apart.

Despite it being relatively early, the venue is already filling up fast when he walks through into the heavy beat of music and the blue haze of spot lighting. A gargantuan chandelier infused with LED lights hangs over a dancefloor and bar that is beginning to get busy. Lingering on the periphery, he looks for Hannibal and the guy from the gym, doing the same afterwards from the entrance to the lounge on the second floor before moving back to the bar. A couple of drinks by the bar side later, he sees them. Emerging from the club entrance and moving in a small body towards the lounge. The guy from the gym. Two more of his sort. A female. Her arm in Hannibal's. None of them look towards the dancefloor on their way up, and he remains by the bar for a while longer, watching the lounge entrance. Eventually, he realises he has gained the attention of two young women dancing in tandem. Local or not, their staring eyes and red-lipped smiles speak a universal language beneath the blue beams, and Will allows himself to smile back, twitchingly, before turning back to the bar. When his third drink comes, he takes it and begins to cut his way through the mass of bodies on route to the second floor.

Hanging back to avoid being seen, Will peers into the venue from the doorway. Hannibal is sat with the rest of them on the first lot of L-shaped seating occupying the central floor space in front of the lounge's own DJ. While the seating arrangement is more intimate, the music remains loud enough in this part of the building for the pounding rhythm to be felt through his shoes. It also swallows up the sound of the cork popping on the champagne bottle being wrestled by the gym guy. Taking a sip from his own glass, Will observes the man filling and passing flutes to the others. As Hannibal accepts the one passed his way, Will watches those lips parting to the rim, and wonders where they went for pre-drinks. How much they have already drank. When the female pulls Hannibal up to dance, he seems steady enough on his feet while moving with something of that missing inhibition Will had witnessed at Mohamed's wedding. The man can dance, much to the woman's delight, and their provocative movements soon draw one of the others closer until they are gyrating collectively to the pulsating beat. Her lithe body sandwiched between their white shirts and tailored trousers.

Turning from the sight, he paces up to the railing overlooking the dancefloor. Folding his arms upon it, he starts to lift the glass to his lips when he sees the girls from before coming up the steps. They make eye contact and smile flirtatiously before slipping past into the lounge. The body language telling Will they intend for him to follow. Instead, he faces the chandelier as the LEDs tick over, turning the entire fixture a glaring red above flashing beams of green light. Looking down, he sees a performer climbing onto an aerial hoop hanging above the bar. Watches her bend her body into seductive displays as he sips slowly at his beverage. The sight of her contorted frame turning within the circle calls to that part of him that has been spinning like a coin ever since he'd crossed paths with the man in the other room. She comes to a jolting stop mid-turn, however, and he follows her surprised gaze down to the hand gripping her extended ankle, then to its owner partially obscured by the crowd. Freezing when he sees that familiar head of curls. He spends another half second watching the guy successfully talk her into leaning down towards him – spends the next half scanning the sea of dancing bodies and its periphery for potential bodyguards. But it's hard to tell under the erratic lighting, and impatient to get a clear view of the man's face, he pushes off the railing. Glances into the lounge on passing to find Hannibal dancing still with his buddies. Then makes his way down the steps.

By the time he reaches the floor, he loses sight of the man, and has to negotiate the periphery of the packed dancefloor in the attempt to relocate him. Drink still in hand, he scans the VIP tables, especially the more hidden ones, and checks the other bar. He does this repeatedly a few times until he has run out of nooks and crannies to inspect. Then, suspecting a high end club to have private rooms somewhere in the back, he approaches a member of staff to enquire. But the name doesn't seem to register, unless the other is simply staying shtum having sworn to secrecy. Still, without a lead, Will starts to wonder if he had imagined it. Looking back towards the bar, he sees a different girl in the hoop. Uncaring of being perceived as a lecherous foreigner, he asks the worker about the

previous performer – the slim white girl with the ponytail – and, surprisingly, is told her name. When he tells Will he'll be able to find her if he asks for her at the bar, he starts to suspect the young man of being part of some underground organisation. Yakuza, maybe. Not wanting to unwittingly open a can of worms, he heads back up to the lounge, intending to speak with Hannibal. When he reaches the doorway, however, he sees only the woman and the two guys who are now dancing with the girls from the dancefloor while she sits and drinks heavily from the flute in the her hand. Before going up to them, Will turns and searches for the restroom.

When he pushes open the door, the restroom floods abruptly with noise, and the sudden amplification makes the man look over. Stood against the sinks, he appears to be propping Hannibal up in his arms with the latter's head down on his shoulder and obscured from view. Stepping inside, Will lets the door swing to a close behind him. His hands by his sides.

"What's going on?" he says, voice quiet yet clear against the backdrop of muted music. He looks up from Hannibal's slumped body to the man's face. Begins to walk over.

"He had one too many," he exhales as Will puts his hands on Hannibal and pulls him out of the other's grasp. As that limp body falls back against him, he knows this is no ordinary intoxication.

"How many has he had?" he utters as he lowers Hannibal onto the floor against the nearby wall and takes his face in hand to get a better look at those hooded eyes that are barely open. Their dark depths showing little sign of recognition as Will checks his pulse.

"I don't know," the voice says breezily behind him. "Wasn't counting."

Finding a steady beat, he removes his hand and Hannibal's chin drops to his chest.

"What was he drinking," he says, dragging the other by the upper arms into something resembling a sit that hopefully won't send him pitching forward onto his face.

"Everything."

Straightening up, Will rounds suddenly on the man. Walks up and grabs the front of his shirt. With an anxious noise, the guy grabs his wrists.

"Hey-" he begins to say in protest but hesitates when Will brings his face uncomfortably close. His eyes boring into the other's.

"What did you give him?" he utters quietly.

"Get off me," says the man with a frown. His hands doing their best to pry himself free from the unrelenting grasp.

"What," Will murmurs lowly, thrusting his face forward and making the other turn his own to the side with a grimace, "did you give him."

"I don't know what you're-"

The man sees his arm jerking back and raises his hands to shield his face. They move a beat too late as Will's fist crashes into his cheek. Spluttering and cursing in pain, he makes to shove him away, but is forced back against the hard edge of the sink. Fisting the front of his shirt with both hands, Will pushes forward. Bending the other backwards over the basin.

"Answer me," he breathes threateningly into the guy's face.

“Fuck you, man!”

He swings at Will’s gut, the hit making him stagger back enough for the man to wriggle free and start running for the door. Recovering fast, Will sprints after and tackles him onto the ground. Sitting on the other’s back, he grabs his hair.

“Wrong answer,” he grunts before slamming down his skull. Another curse erupts from the man’s lips, muffled and wet, and Will uses the distraction to snatch and pin one of his arms against his back. “Tell me what you gave him,” he grits through his teeth, fingers clenching on those tresses as he maintains his seat upon the thrashing body. He forces the trapped arm higher, wrenching a whimper from below.

“I didn’t give him anything!” he cries, and Will presses his lips together before bouncing his head off the floor and twisting that arm further. The thrashing stops as the man groans lowly in pain. Past his head, Will sees the bright smattering of blood upon the tile.

“I’m going to break your arm now.”

“You’re crazy!”

He tightens his grip. Feels the man tensing all over.

“Please,” he pants. “It was a mistake-”

“You’re fucking right it was.”

Letting go of his hair, Will curls his hand into a fist and punches the back of his head. The man falls still against the floor. Getting off him, Will hooks his arms under the other’s and drags him up and back into the furthest stall. Drops his unconscious body onto the toilet before moving to help Hannibal up.

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Under the glow of lamplight, he avoids looking at the man’s dick, but can’t avoid touching it as he helps Hannibal get undressed. In the taxi, he’d felt the brush of fingers on his thigh and pushed it away while watching the driver in the rear-view mirror. Now, lying on his back, the other watches him through his lashes. And Will knows that look. Having stripped him down to his underwear, he reaches for the cover and tugs it over his body. Covering him up.

Exhaling, he moves over to the mini bar. Opens the door and takes out a bottle of water. Cracking open the lid, he drinks generously from the mouth until it’s all gone, then bins the empty bottle before getting another. Turning around, he looks towards the bed to see Hannibal watching him still. The shape of his arousal faintly discernible beneath the cover. Dragging his eyes away, Will steps up to the other side of the bed and sits down on the edge, facing away.

“I thought I saw Mohamed,” he utters, watching down at the bottle in his hands. “Harassing a dancer.” He thinks of the club worker and the shrewd expression on his polite face. “I was going to find her to ask a few questions. Went to find you, instead.” The restroom returns to the forefront of his mind. The man holding on to Hannibal. Not quite able to manoeuvre him as smoothly as a tall guy would a woman. He feels his brows drawing together as he stares at the tiny Japanese characters on the label of the bottle. “Did you go with him?” he asks eventually, voice an uncomfortable murmur.

Something presses into his lower back from behind. He sits still as heat seeps in intervals through the thin material of his shirt. Slow and steady. His moist breath beginning to stick the patch to his skin. Inhaling, he stands up and turns around to see Hannibal having dragged himself towards him and rolling with effort, now, onto his back. As he stands there, watching down, he sees hooded eyes looking upside down at him. Half-drawn and black with hunger.

“Did you want him?” he asks coolly despite knowing the man has likely been drugged. His gaze moving to the hand that pushes beneath the cover still tangled around Hannibal’s body. To the tip of his tongue peeping out playfully between those lips as the man continues to gaze up at him. Jaw flexing, Will sets the bottle down on the bedside table. Moves his hands to the front of his trousers. Holding that dark stare, he tugs open his belt. Pulls down the zipper. And pushes his hand past the band of his boxer shorts. Without breaking eye contact, he pulls his cock free and, fisting the hardening shaft, begins to stroke.

“Did you want to suck his dick?” he continues to ask, voice hushed and low, lofting his brows with feigned indifference even while the red mist pushes him to step forward, dick in hand, to clasp Hannibal’s chin. Leaning closer, he breathes in and presses his erection to the other’s face. Sees that tongue slipping out to make contact.

“Yeah?” Will utters as he rubs himself back and forth against that vacant expression. Watching the flutter of fair lashes as he moves with increasing aggression. “Pretending it’s me?”

Grabbing himself by the base, he butts his head against Hannibal’s mouth. Feels it opening for him as he leans over the man, his hands bracing against the bed on either side of his body. Fingers digging into the cover as he presses deeper with a grunt. Pushing back the bedding, he frees Hannibal from his underwear. Spits into his hand before gripping that rigid length tight. Looking down between their bodies, he begins to tug the same time he thrusts shallowly into the other’s mouth. Until muffled sounds escape sluggishly from those stretched lips. All of a sudden, Hannibal’s dick strains against his fingers, and a warm jet hits the underside of his jaw. Swiping at his face and letting go of the pulsating shaft as it continues to ejaculate, Will puts his hands on the bed again and closes his eyes as he starts to fuck the other’s mouth in earnest. It doesn’t take much. Just a few collisions with the back of his throat and he’s pulling out, hand once more wrapping around himself to jerk hurriedly as his release forces a low growl through his clenching teeth. He opens his eyes in time to see the spurts landing on the chest and stomach beneath him. Catching his breath, he pushes up into a stand and sees Hannibal lying with his eyes closed. Putting himself away, he crouches down and wipes a trail of saliva from the other’s face. Leans closer to check his pulse and feels the soft puff of his breath against his cheek.

Sighing a mixture of relief and shame, Will goes to get the box tissue and bottled water. Comes back to clean Hannibal up before moving him back onto his side of the bed. Tugging the cover over him, he sits down on the edge of the bed. For a while, he just watches the man sleep. Noting the steady rise and fall of his chest. Feeling no better than the guy he beat unconscious at the club. Exhaling, he puts the bottle of water down on the bedside table. It pushes against the box tissue, which in turn nudges the tablet over the edge. As Will bends to pick it up, his eyes fall on the lit up screen. Straightening up, he reads the title of the article. *Top Secret Places To Eat In Tokyo*. Scrolls down idly until he sees a photo of the woman’s restaurant. The text below talks about the *mysterious elegance* surrounding the establishment without once referring to the owner. He scrolls down to the bottom. Pauses when he sees a photo of the author. Brow furrowing.

“Hey,” he utters, eyes still on the tablet. “Hannibal.”

He looks at that sleeping face. Takes hold of his shoulder to give him a shake.

“Wake up.”

A faint frown appears on Hannibal’s face, but his eyes remain closed.

“Hey,” Will says, louder this time as his hand moves up to lightly slap the man awake. “Stop pretending.”

Black slits slip open to regard him.

“You wanted him alone,” says Will. “Was that the plan?” *Another one-man plan*.

When those eyes begin to close again, he drops the tablet and grabs him by his upper arms.

“You’re not really drugged, are you?” he says, staring hard at that impassive face. “Are you?” he asks again, impatient as the anger rises. His fingers digging into those biceps. A faint flinch passes over that mild countenance, and Will lets go, watching as Hannibal slumps against the headboard and leans unsteadily to the side. His own hands slow to provide support. The sight of which infuriates Will the more. “Alright,” he snaps, standing up and putting his hands on his hips as he glares down at the other, holding those black slivers. “So you let it happen, then.” He pauses to lick and chew frustratedly on his bottom lip. His heart pounding in his ears. “And then what? Use the hotel next door? Come back here? Let him fuck you because I won’t?” The final accusation slips out before he can stop it, and he scoffs unpleasantly, looking away and touching his beard as he swallows down the hurt. *Don’t you care what happens to you?*

“You think you’re so clever,” he utters reproachfully, eyes meeting Hannibal’s from the corners. “Look at you…”

Perhaps it is the scorn in his eyes. His twisted expression. The disgust in his half whisper. But those hooded eyes look down, and Will thinks he saw a glimmering in their dark depths just before they do. Immediately feels a burst of remorse and anger at the ease in which the other starts yet another river of guilt and regret flowing within him. Turning around, Will folds his arms and walks up to the balcony doors.

“I’d put you back behind glass if I could have the old doc back,” he murmurs.

After a while of staring into the night, he looks back to see Hannibal lying on the bed, facing the other way. Exhaling quietly, he moves to the chaise lounge. Eases himself down.

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He grows more reckless when around you.

Bedelia’s voice is close, and Will follows it down the corridor, pausing at the threshold to the kitchen when he hears grunts of exertion. Hannibal is lying naked on his back upon the dining table. An intravenous line runs from his arm to the bag of suspended blood. Beneath the white glare of the electric chandelier, his skin is pale and the blood seeping from the nicked jugular a vibrant red. His eyes are half drawn as the man from the gym thrusts into him.

You have blood on your hands still.

Her words transport him into the man’s shoes, and he finds himself thrusting while staring down at dishevelled tresses falling across his eyelids. The warm puffs grow weak beneath his hand clasping over Hannibal’s mouth, stopping altogether.

Was Persephone tricked?

As he continues to chase his release in that lifeless body, he becomes aware of her presence in the kitchen. Leaning against the edge of the sink. Sipping from the steaming mug in her hand as she holds his gaze with her piercing eyes.

Or did she knowingly eat the seeds?

The ringing of the phone scatters her face and Will opens his eyes to the ceiling. He hadn't drawn the curtains and the thin white veil does nothing to filter the brightness of the room. Pushing up into a sit, he looks over to find Hannibal still lying on his side, facing the other way. The ringing continues and Will keeps his eyes on that unmoving shape beneath the cover as he makes his way over to the phone. Expecting it to be the woman from the restaurant, he checks the time on the display. It is no longer early morning.

"Yes," he says into the receiver.

"Is this Victor?"

A female voice. Not one he recognises.

"No," Will answers, genuinely forgetting at first.

"His friend, then."

He glances over at the bed.

"What's this about?" he says with a touch of impatience. He should've checked on the man before taking the call.

"An acquaintance of mine was attacked in a club restroom last night."

He does his best not to scoff down the receiver.

"He wants to press charges so he asked you to call?" he says coolly.

"No."

Leaning against the table, he waits for her to continue. His eyes on Hannibal as he tries to make out the movement of respiration beneath the cover. Thinks he can just about see the subtle rise and fall.

"I wish to press charges," the voice continues to say and this time, Will does snort derisively.

"Right-"

"Against Christian."

He pauses, listening to her intake of breath.

"I have reason to believe I was the intended target of an attempted date rape. But I don't have enough evidence. That's why I'm calling. I think Victor took my drink by mistake."

Frowning, Will doesn't say anything.

"If he wishes to press charges also-"

“He’s not awake at the moment,” he says, interrupting. “If you leave your room number, I’ll tell him to give you a call back.”

Putting down the receiver, Will walks over to Hannibal’s side of the bed. He sits down carefully on the edge and folds his arms upon his legs. Hunched over, he turns his face to watch that sleeping expression. The accusations he’d fired the other’s way come back to him, angry and loud, and for a moment, he considers the novelty of returning to the phone and dialling her number. Imagines how the conversation might go.

“You feel regret for your actions.”

“Yes.”

“Why.”

“I took advantage of him.”

“A strange concept.”

“I know.”

“And are you absolutely sure that was indeed the case.”

“No.”

A pause as he thinks about those downcast eyes.

“But I think I hurt him. Maybe.”

“The same question applies.”

“I said some things.”

“What is it that you wish to say to him now?”

The phone interrupts his thoughts a second time, and he gets up to make his way back over.

“Yes.”

“You appear to be running late.”

Whilst her voice instantly sends an uncomfortable tremor through his body, Will keeps his own neutral as he speaks.

“We may have to reschedule,” he says to the wall.

“Oh?”

A curious lilt in that affecting alto.

“We were out last night.”

“I see.”

Amusement in her tone.

“And when are you hoping to reschedule for, Mr Graham.”

The use of his name suggests the woman knows he has taken the reins for the time being, and he straightens up more. Chin lifting.

“Tomorrow,” he says.

“Tomorrow morning.”

“Does that work for you?” he says, a touch impertinent as he lofts his brows.

“Of course,” she answers cordially. “Tomorrow, then.”

“Yes.”

“And Mr Graham.”

He pauses, waiting for her to continue.

“I would like you to know that I abhor the wanton wastage of food.”

So host a fucking cannibal buffet.

“We’ll be there,” he says firmly, and puts down the receiver.

Hand running through his curls, he turns on the spot and sees Hannibal beginning to push up. Walks over to watch him settling into a slumped sit against the headboard. His hooded eyes looking bleary as they stare ahead through lowered lashes. His unkempt hair a stark contrast to the immaculate comb-back at the club.

“Hey,” says Will, tucking his hands into his trouser pockets. He hadn’t changed before falling asleep on the chaise lounge, and is aware of how rumpled his shirt is. “How you feeling?”

When Hannibal doesn’t answer immediately, he steps closer to take the bottled water from the bedside table.

“I’ve rearranged the meeting for tomorrow morning instead,” he explains, cracking open the lid and holding it out towards that vacant expression. After a moment, those dark eyes focus on the offering and a hand reaches up to take it. Maintaining his hold until he’s sure the bottle won’t slip from the other’s grasp, Will watches it being lowered slowly onto the bedding covering the man’s lap, and delves his hands back into his pockets.

“Do you remember much about last night?” he asks, voice quiet. A little tentative.

“I went to some bars and a night club,” Hannibal answers, blinking slow at nothing in particular.

“Do you remember seeing me?” says Will. “At the club?”

No response.

“I thought I saw Mohamed,” he continues to say, pausing before adding, “Do you know anything about it?”

“No.”

Will glances down.

“What was it that you had planned last night,” he asks.

“To have a good time,” Hannibal answers.

“That it?” he says, looking up.

“Yes.”

He watches Hannibal slowly lift the bottle to his lips and take a small sip.

“It had nothing to do with him being the author of that article.”

“No.”

When Will says nothing further, Hannibal takes another sip from the bottle.

“Have you read the article,” he asks eventually.

“Yes,” Will answers, folding his arms. *Briefly*.

“Then you know he’s not the author.”

Brow furrowing, he waits for Hannibal to elaborate.

“His twin brother travels the world writing a series called Top Secret Places To,” says the man as he rests his head against the headboard. “Most of it is crude and juvenile. Harmless.” The tousled head tilts. “Though his brother mentioned he’d got into some trouble with certain establishments.”

“When did you learn about this?” Will asks.

“When you were sleeping off your rusty nails,” answers Hannibal, lifting the bottle to his lips. “I went to the gym briefly.”

Without commenting, Will waits for him to continue.

“They were due to meet at Villa for a catch up. I thought it would be interesting to speak with him.”

A pause as though in reference to the argument on the balcony.

“He never showed up,” Hannibal finishes saying before drinking long and deep.

Will steps closer and sits down slowly on the edge of the bed. Facing away.

“One of them called, wanting to press charges,” he begins to say, leaning his folded arms upon his knees. “Said she has reason to believe she was the target of an attempted date rape.” He glances down uncomfortably. “Wanted to know if you can help her with her missing evidence.”

Hannibal does not comment and Will listens to the sound of him gulping quietly on the water. The silence drags on indefinitely and his stomach suddenly makes a strange growling noise as though there is a creature inside, protesting.

“We should probably move on soon,” he says. “Avoid any unwanted attention.”

When Hannibal continues to remain silent, Will slowly straightens up and leans back on his hands. His fingers brushing briefly against the other's legs through the cover.

"We could go somewhere with a hot spring," he suggests, voice light and faintly whimsical. "Up in the mountains somewhere. Saw it on a brochure in the lobby." He looks down at the tops of his shoes. Feet suddenly wishing to be free. "Looked good."

"Sounds good."

At the lack of a pause, Will turns his face to see Hannibal lowering the empty bottle.

"Yeah?" he says quietly, watching that inscrutable countenance.

"But first, there is something we must do."

"We is good," he utters lowly, drawing hooded eyes his way at last with the mixture of relief and sarcasm in his voice. Holding that lidded gaze in earnest, Will lofts his brows. "Let's do it."

"So take off your clothes."

The smile falters on Will's lips.

"…I meant what you've got planned," he says lowly. Hesitant.

Hannibal lofts his invisible brows.

Will can't raise his own any higher. So he knits them together instead as he licks his lips. Lets them hang agape as he tries to measure the conviction behind that stare of indifference. Eyes narrowing a notch.

"You want me to take off my clothes…"

"Such is the prerequisite for washing oneself," says Hannibal loftily, eyes falling on the unsightly lines criss-crossing the front of his shirt.

Scoffing as the heat begins to creep beneath his collar, Will faces the front as he stands. Hands moving to his hips as he takes a breath.

"You don't smell like a bunch of roses yourself," he mutters as he makes his way to the bathroom. Stepping inside and turning on the shower, he doesn't hear Hannibal's mild observation.

"Iš tikrųjų. Aš kvepiuosi taip pat kaip tu."

Chapter End Notes

Translation:

"Iš tikrųjų. Aš kvepiuosi taip pat kaip tu." - "Indeed. I smell just like you."

Shizumu

Chapter Notes

> Chapter intended to be read to Rainych's Japanese cover of 'Blinding Lights' by The Weeknd: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E22RKYWzZG4

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Hannibal comes out of the bathroom, Will is standing at the windows, watching out.

“We’re going to the restaurant.”

At the sound of his voice, Will looks back over his shoulder. Meets that hooded gaze from beneath the mat of haphazard tresses.

“After midnight,” Hannibal continues to say as he rubs at his hair with the hand towel. Will’s gaze lowers to the pale star of his old bullet wound. The water droplet navigating its way past its erratic edge.

“We’re breaking in?” he asks, facing the window.

“Yes.”

Turning around with his hands in his trouser pockets, Will tilts his head as he gives Hannibal a casual look over.

“You should rest up,” he says. “While the drugs are still in your system.”

“I’m fine,” says Hannibal, dragging the towel from his head onto his shoulders.

“Did you know about the drugs?” he asks, eyes lowering back to the star.

“I suppose I did.”

Blue meets back.

“It’s not uncommon for those like Christian to carry some form of narcotic on their person,” Hannibal explains as he breaks eye contact to untuck the towel wrapped around his waist.

“Did he offer you some?” Will asks casually.

“Yes, but I declined,” answers Hannibal.

“Do you remember how you got back?” he continues to ask, arms folding.

Hannibal doesn’t answer as he dries himself off with the towel.

“You know you could’ve been abducted.”

“You sound like a paranoid parent.”

“You gave me reason to be one.”

He looks off to a corner of the room, adding, “And it’s not paranoia believing that asshole has followed us here.” *He has the means to, that rich sonuvabitch*.

“Perhaps if you are so intent on acting as my personal bodyguard, you should make sure to come along next time.”

“Or stop you from leaving.”

He watches Hannibal put down the towel and reach for his underwear lying atop the cover beside his neatly laid outfit.

“I apologise for referring to you as deaf and blind the other night,” says the other as he bends over to pull on the shorts.

Will scoffs at the memory, brows lofting.

“Especially when it was you who was being-”

“I can always retract my apology,” Hannibal interrupts to say, straightening up and reaching for the next garment.

“No, you’ve started so well,” Will drawls. “Please continue.”

“I was not aware I owed you further apologies.”

“Not to me,” Will utters. *To yourself*.

“Admit it,” says Hannibal as he buttons up his shirt. “You enjoy playing hero.”

“So you expected to be saved,” says Will, lofting his brows pointedly at that calm countenance.

“I expected to get trashed,” Hannibal answers loftily, reaching for his trousers. “Happens to the best of us, considering what we have to put up with.”

Those dark eyes spear him with a look.

“I think that’s my line,” says Will flatly.

The phone rings and he walks over to the handset. Picking up the receiver, he presses it to his ear while holding Hannibal’s gaze. A woman’s voice greets him on the other side.

“I’m afraid he’s still asleep,” he says, and she tells him to pass on her contact details, which he agrees to do. After listening to her speak for a moment longer, he gives her their false contact details and says goodbye before hanging up. “Your dance buddy’s checking out after lunch,” he explains, facing Hannibal and folding his arms again. “Turns out Christian already checked out in the early hours, the dick.” The last two words uttered with contempt under his breath as he picks up the weighty ledger. “Let’s see what room service is like,” he exhales, opening it to the lunch menu.

Room service comes and they eat at the little round table – Hannibal picking up his sushi as though they’re delicate artefacts as Will spoons sliced beef and rice into his mouth. After eating, they venture

out for a walk in the nearby palace gardens. From the grounds, Will looks up at the windows of the hotel gym rooms. Tells Hannibal as they continue walking that he would prefer to ditch the sightseeing for a workout. They want to be in peak form, after all, if they're going to tackle their adversary.

"Are you afraid our hostess is a black belt in karate," says Hannibal amusedly, stepping onto the bridge.

"Even if she isn't, her accomplices could be," says Will.

"Are you afraid her receptionist is a black belt in karate."

"Laugh now," Will scoffs. "Wait till you've got both on your ass. Then we'll see who's laughing."

"Me."

"I could throw you off this bridge just now," Will mutters under his breath.

"Aren't you going to embrace me first."

"Funny."

****

When they return to the hotel, they spend a good couple of hours at the gym, taking breaks in-between. Afterwards, they shower and head back up to the room to rest and order a small bite through room service before settling for a collective nap. When Will next opens his eyes, he sees Hannibal lying on his front across him on the bed. His face half sunk in the pillow next to Will's. His half-drawn eyes on Will's arousal.

"Platonic love is a means of ascent," he murmurs quietly as Will considers the colour of his lashes. "In contemplation of the divine."

Lying there on his back, Will does not snatch up the cover nor move his hands to obscure the obvious.

"The ladder begins with carnal attraction and ends with transcendence of the soul," he continues to murmur thoughtfully.

"True immortality is achieved via the offspring of the virtuous," Will mutters after racking his memory on the classics. Sighing through the nose, he looks past Hannibal to the windows. "I guess you'd make a nice family portrait together," he sneers quietly. "Kids carrying the dog like some Nazi propaganda poster." *What are we doing here?* Watching the sky, his eyes fall to a half close as he senses Abigail's absence between them. "There must be times when your compassion for me feels like a real hindrance," he murmurs.

His view is obscured as Hannibal pushes up from the bed. Finding himself watching that sleepy countenance, Will has the urge to pull him back down. *Let's just lie here for a bit longer. I'm exhausted*.

"I believe you misunderstand the nature of my compassion," says Hannibal quietly, watching the door. As he gets up, Will asks where he's going.

"For a swim," the other answers.

“Wait,” he says, sitting up. “I’ll come with you.”

****

They swim competitive laps in the empty pool, Hannibal proper going for it without giving Will a chance to catch him up. He wears a waterproof dressing on his thigh, but his mobility is pretty much back to normal. It didn’t throb as much at the gym. Perhaps he is getting used to stab wounds, he thinks to himself as he catches his breath on the edge. Regardless, Hannibal remains the stronger swimmer between them. Leaving Will at the edge with a perfect flip turn, he continues to swim with a powerful freestyle stroke to the other side and back.

Following their second workout, they shower again, get changed, and dine at the restaurant. After dinner, they go to the bar until the silence makes Will restless enough to suggest they head back up to get some more rest before heading out later that night.

****

Having changed into tee and shorts, Will is in bed, tucked under the cover because the balcony door is still open. The lights are off and the room is dark with the exception of the dim glow coming from the bathroom. Outside, Hannibal is standing at the rail in just his robe. He has been standing there for a long time. He had a lot to drink at the bar. Eventually, Will climbs out of bed and, arms wrapping around himself, walks over and out onto the balcony.

“Hey,” he utters, stepping up beside the other. Hands on the rail, Hannibal is staring through his lashes into the distance at nothing in particular. The night is cold and the wind is blowing his hair across his eyes and stirring the slack belt of his robe.

“Do you wish to have sex, Will,” he murmurs without looking his way.

“No. Come on,” says Will, starting to turn in. When he sees Hannibal remaining at the rail, he stops and faces the other. “Hey.”

No response. Leaving him there, Will goes in and makes his way back to the bed. Climbing in, he tugs the cover over himself to stay warm. Instead of falling asleep, however, he keeps watch on Hannibal as the man sits down and reclines in one of the outdoor chairs.

You’d better not catch ill again.

Closing his eyes, he pushes aside memories of Thessaloniki before they can begin to spread their tendrils through his body. But the longer he lies there in bed, the more he starts to suspect the other has fallen asleep outside, so tosses the cover aside, climbs out of bed, and strides back over and out onto the balcony. Stopping at the chair, he looks down to see Hannibal sat back with his eyes closed and his robe open at the neck and coming loose at the chest. Taking a firm hold of his upper arm, Will shakes him awake before brusquely pulling Hannibal into a stand. Pushing the other into the room, he pulls the sliding door shut, cutting off the cold breeze.

By the time Will has climbed back into bed, Hannibal has only just managed to remove his robe, which falls like a shed skin to the floor. He watches as the man fumbles with the cover before lowering himself naked into the bed and lying down on his side, facing away. Exhaling, Will stares ahead as he lies there on his back. In his peripheral vision, he sees Hannibal trembling, and it reminds him of the night he threw them into the sea. When, having dragged themselves onto land, he saw the man on all fours in the sand beside him, head down and shaking all over. His hooded eyes struggling with the sting of salt as he caught his breath. Sighing inwardly, Will finally rolls onto his side facing

the other's brand. Shifts closer until his body presses against Hannibal's to find his skin is as cold as marble against his chest.

"Do you wish to have sex, Will."

His voice is sleepy.

"Stop saying that," Will utters at the nape in front of him. When he feels Hannibal reaching a hand back, he catches it and brings it back round.

When he falls asleep, he dreams of being separated from Hannibal in the sea. Left bobbing in the haphazard waves and blinking against the blood running down from his skull as the other swims away.

****

As Will struggles with his nightmare, Hannibal pulls him to face himself. Although the other obscures the glow of the bathroom with his body, Hannibal doesn't need the light to see rivulets of sweat and tears. Clasping the back of Will's head, he presses his damp face to his shoulder. Pushes his free hand into sodden boxers.

****

Hannibal swims back to him with such force, they crash into one another amongst the black waters tossing them mercilessly to and fro. Relief choking the air from his lungs, Will holds on like his life depends on it. Clings onto Hannibal's arms as heat bleeds between their bodies forced to buck and undulate by the waves.

****

Freed from his soaked underwear, Will is hard and pulsating within the clasp of his slowly stroking hand. He feels his breath blowing quick and shallow against his neck. Feels clammy fingers grab suddenly at his own arousal and exhales through flaring nostrils. Eyes closed, he leans his head against Will's. Remembers the smell of blood when they'd embraced on the bluff. Tugging at one another's shirts. And tightens the clutch of his fingers.

****

Panting as he nears, Will pulls out of the sea to find himself tossed in bed by the grip of a hand. Finds his own holding on to Hannibal. The air is thick with the rasp of their breaths. With the smell of sweat and need. He bucks uncontrollably into the tight tunnel of Hannibal's hand the same time he feels the other moving similarly against his own. Then a weight drops suddenly upon his shoulder and he hears a muffled gasp the same time a deep throbbing begins in his hand. Hannibal's release beating like a heart ripped raw from its body. Spurting hot, erratic jets that land on his tee and penetrate the already wet material clinging to his chest. As the same cresting wave surges to the surface within his bucking body, Will digs his fingers into the other's arms. Opens his mouth to gasp as a swimmer does having broken the surface for air. And bites down on Hannibal's shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

沈む, しずむ (shizumu) - to sink / to feel down

Chiyoh

The incessant shriek of an alarm finally sinks its way down, striking the sea floor of his subconscious. Stirred by the sound and a sluggish movement beneath him, Will opens his eyes to Hannibal's face, his features made just visible by the glow of the bathroom. Blinking slow, he realises he is lying on top of the other, trapping that naked body against the bed with his own weight as his arms map those strewn haphazardly on either side of them upon the sheets. Waist down, they are a tangle of legs. The alarm is still ringing, but hooded eyes are slow to open; despite the unsettling intimacy of their unintentional embrace, Will himself is slow to move as he sees Hannibal gazing sleepily up at him through his lashes. He holds that stare a fraction longer before pushing up on his arms and looking for the source of the noise, conscious of the way his body presses against the other's as he leans over. Picking the phone up from the bedside table, he fumbles to turn off the alarm. Feels fingers closing around his wrist afterwards and glances down to see those half-drawn eyes watching him.
"I want to show you something," says Hannibal, voice still a little thick with sleep as his fingers slip up to take the phone. Letting go of it, Will rolls off and down onto his back. He can feel their shoulders touching as they lie there side by side while he tucks himself back into his shorts. The phone is offered his way, its screen glowing bright in the dark. He sees his own disgruntled expression. Sees that smile. *Take a photo with me*.
"…that's nice?" he utters hesitantly, eyeing the selfie.
"Nicer if you'd smiled."
He scoffs at the murmur, moving a hand to itch his chest through the tee and pausing when his fingers brush against dried patches of semen.
"Not much to smile about," he mutters, looking away.
"Shame, considering its devastating potential. You ought to consider deploying it against the adversary," says Hannibal thoughtfully.
Hesitating, Will looks to a corner of the ceiling as he folds his arms over his chest.
"They weren't all fake," he says begrudgingly under his breath.
"I didn't mind."
Lips pressing together, Will frowns. Pushing up into a sit, he rakes a hand through his hair. Swallows down the rising guilt before uttering lowly, "Aren't we getting up?"
Something lands on the cover beside him and he looks down at the phone screen. Sees a woman's face. Her dark eyes familiar. Brows knitting, he picks up the phone. Moves his fingers against the screen to zoom out. Then back in. The long blonde hair and make-up had thrown him at first.
"She's here?" he asks.
"She is."
Looking back over his shoulder, he sees Hannibal gazing ahead at nothing in particular as he lies there, idly tracing the star of his bullet scar with the tips of his fingers. In the dim, Will can just about see the dried specks of his own semen on the skin of the man's abdomen. He looks leaner these days. A chef removed from his natural environment. His ingredients. His lavish dinner parties. Because he is with Will as opposed to those who can reunite him with all that.
"She's like your mother," Will utters, returning his attention to the photo and the figure in the background. "Watching on with disapproval."
"Do you think so?" comments Hannibal amusedly.
"I know so," Will scoffs, adding after a beat: "You don't deserve her." The quiet scorn in his voice masking the jealousy. Hannibal hums and he looks back to see hooded eyes slipping almost to a close.
"It's nice to have someone less inclined to begrudge a monster's attempt at happiness."
Facing the front, Will pulls his knees up and folds his arms across them.
"Does it really bore you that much," he begins quietly to say. "Living away from all this."
"The bluff is still eroding."

At the cryptic reply, Will drops his eyes back to the phone in his hand.
"I remain in freefall," Hannibal continues to say in a hushed voice. For a moment, Will says nothing as he studies the photo. *That smile*. Slowly, he turns his face to observe those sharp features from the corners of his eyes. Hannibal's hand resting absently upon his chest. The way that dark gaze continues to stare off into space.
"Heard those hot springs have healing properties," he says eventually, waiting for Hannibal to meet him in the eye. "The brochure claims they can cure all ailments," he adds with a lofting of his brows. "Except love sickness."
He watches that hand as it begins to stroke its fingers idly back and forth, their tips grazing over fine hairs as Hannibal lowers his eyes.
"Worth a try," Will mutters, returning his own to the phone being toyed with between his hands. "Pain supposedly disappears after soaking at these places…"
"You did bite me again."
He looks over into black.
"You chucked the chuck then realised you had a taste for it," says Hannibal with his head leaning to one side as he regards Will at last with a thoughtful expression. "Perhaps there's a cannibal in you yet."
"After the poor man's ribeye?" he scoffs quietly, leaning back on his hand and raising an eyebrow.
"In the hands of an experienced chef, chuck steak can be beautiful," says Hannibal softly as he relinquishes eye contact to slip his hand over his shoulder and push up into a sit. Brow knitting at the show of discomfort, the prolonged pensivity, Will finally asks:
"…are you alright?"
Closing his eyes, Hannibal slowly rolls his neck.
"You have made me most tender, Will," he murmurs, eyes slipping open to regard him briefly before he stands.

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While they get dressed, Hannibal explains the assistance their old acquaintance has been lending them behind the scenes. Once more, Will doesn't appreciate not being made privy to said arrangement, but listens without interrupting. For the time being.

It transpires that a handful of high end restaurants in the city have fresh seafood delivered especially to the premises in the early morning, and Hannibal's right hand woman has been keeping watch on one restaurant in particular. Deliveries are usually made by 2am after the ingredients become available from the Toyosu fish market. Access to the restaurant's cold room is via proximity card. And the van used to transport the goods is always the same, although the driver sometimes changes. If they intercept the van after it leaves the fish market and before it reaches the restaurant, they can use the delivery as a cover for getting into the premises.
"What about security?" Will asks as he sits on the edge of the bed pulling on his Flyknits – an ad hoc airport purchase when they'd wheeled past the store and a giant poster of a runner made him think he needed a pair in his unsettled life. Hannibal, too, though the man hadn't looked impressed when Will had called out and stopped him from entering another shop with suited mannequins in the window display.
"There are no visible external cameras in the unloading area," answers Hannibal, also pulling on his shoes as he sits on the chaise lounge. "It's likely there will be some inside."
Having finished first, Will sits there watching until Hannibal straightens up into a stand. Sensing his stare, the man looks over while smoothing down the front of his denim shirt.
"You are unsure," he says.
"I mean," says Will, lofting his brows at the other's feet. "You're wearing sneakers with suit trousers."
"I would hardly call them suit trousers."

“What would you call them then?”
“A second skin.”
“Why are you wearing them if we’re supposed to be getting changed again?”
“Because they’re not my best trousers.”
“Are you even going to be able to pull them off in time?”
“I assure you-”
“Because they’re tight.”
Will looks up, his eyebrows still reaching for his hairline.
“Really tight,” he says again to that impassive face.
“Are you suggesting I’ve gained weight?”
“If anything, I think you’ve lost some. You’ll have to gorge yourself at the hot spring.”
“Is that what you intend to do?”
“Isn’t that what you’re *meant* to do?” says Will, standing up and resting his hands on his hips.
“Bathing after a meal delays digestion,” states Hannibal. “Blood around the stomach flows to other body parts as a result.”
Will hums and waits for the other to head towards the door before starting to follow.
“No masturbating in the onsen, then,” he says, arms folding as he watches that behind directly ahead of him.
“That’s assuming you don’t faint first from the heat.”

****

Outside the hotel, a car with tinted windows is sat waiting for them. Hannibal moves to the passenger door so Will gets in the back. Pulling the door to, he looks into the rear-view mirror. Sees those smokey eyes watching him.
“Chiyoh,” he utters in greeting.
“Will,” she says tonelessly in return. Red-lipped and face framed by tumbling blonde waves, it is almost impossible to find the Chiyoh he last saw at Christmas, standing on the doorstep of his - *Molly’s* - house. Yet the old disdain, cool and thinly veiled, has not changed. Instead, Will finds it merely accentuated by the highlights in her eye make-up.
“Strip,” she says, turning her attention to the road.
“Excuse me?”
“There’s a bag beside you,” explains Hannibal as the car begins to pull away from the curb.
Pulling the nondescript duffle onto his lap, Will unzips it and rifles through its contents. In the dark of the car, everything looks black. Black cap. Black trousers. Black hoody. Black wellingtons.
“Sexy,” he mutters.
“I know I am.”
Looking up, he sees Hannibal beginning to unbutton his shirt. Catching his lidded gaze in the rear-view mirror, Will is reminded sharply of the black sultriness that cuts deeper than even the most beautifully made eyes. Knows there is no cure for him either as he starts to undress.

****

Parked up between some cars off the side of the road, Will keeps watch on the block of apartments. It’s not yet 2am, but the streets are deserted and the number of cars passing through are few and far between.
“You sure he’s going to come this way?” he utters as he continues to peer out the window.
“I’m sure.”
At the confident sound of her voice, he glances into the rear-view mirror. Measures the conviction of her stare before returning his attention to the building.
“And if another helpful soul decides to come to your aid?” he says sarcastically, eyes straying to the point where her skirt becomes leg in the driver’s seat. Long and bare.

“We kill them,” she says simply.
“Of course,” he utters under his breath. “Why did I even ask.”
A pause as he looks out the rear window to the empty commercial building. The multitude of office windows standing empty across the road.
“Remind me why I’m the one hiding in the boot?” he asks suddenly.
“You’re smaller,” says Hannibal.
“*You’re* smaller,” Will snorts.
“He’s more experienced at knocking people out,” states Chiyoh.
“I know,” says Will flatly. “I am one of those people.”
“I had him at hello,” says Hannibal.
“You mean goodbye,” corrects Chiyoh.
“None of you watched me knock a guy out cold in a club the other night,” says Will quickly to distract from the needling of Chiyoh’s jibe. It only adds to the discomfort resurfacing from the memory of Dolarhyde’s attack and how easily he had succumbed. How he could have died that night. And left him waiting again.
“How much do we have?” he asks, meeting both their eyes in the rear-view mirror. “The chloroform.”
“Enough,” answers Chiyoh.
Enough to knock the both of you out so I can drive us out of here?
“If you prefer, you can wait for us at the hotel,” says Hannibal.
Frowning, Will averts his gaze back out the window. *Like I waited the other night.*
“Not fair,” he utters under his breath.
“You are such a baby,” says Chiyoh plainly and, bristling at the monotonous dig, Will folds his arms and leans back against the seat.
“I’m not the one who cried during-” he begins to drawl then stops himself. *Nobody should know about that*. He searches for hooded eyes in the rear-view mirror. Sees them looking aside, as though he hadn’t heard. Or is pretending not to have.

****

Next to all the crazy shit he has done since Hannibal came into his life, hiding in the boot of a car is pretty pedestrian by comparison. Nevertheless, it still makes him uncomfortable. Not so much the being hemmed into a confined space as not being able to see the other or say the things he wants to say while Chiyoh is out of earshot. *If this is your idea of keeping me in the loop, I guess I have to beg harder next time, huh?*

Soon, however, he hears the muffle of voices outside as their target is led to the car. The sound of the driver door opening. Feels the subtle movement of someone climbing in before the passenger door is opened then closed. Chiyoh says something in Japanese, her voice low and provocative. The driver door shuts. The man says something back, his voice also hushed. Cue the interruption. Coming as a sudden collective click of locks slotting solidly into place as Will senses Hannibal springing forward on the other side to grab the man’s head from behind the driver seat. Can picture the rag being pressed over the victim’s face as he listens to their muffled cries and the rustle of struggling limbs. Anticipates the injection being administered by painted fingers in-between the flailing, then waits for his cue.

****

The man’s movements begin to grow sluggish. His wrists tied fast with cable tie – courtesy of Chiyoh. As soon as those eyes roll back into the other’s head, Hannibal reaches for the lever that flips down the large section of the backseat, releasing Will back into the quiet space of the car. He leans out the way as Will grabs and hauls the man back over the folded seat and into the black depths of the boot. Some keys are chucked his way, followed by a lanyard, on the end of which hangs a proximity card. When Will has finished securing the man, he climbs out of the boot and has little choice but to perch

momentarily in Hannibal's lap while erecting the lowered seat. The sudden weight of him transports Hannibal back to being trapped beneath that warm body on the hotel bed. Then, just as quickly, Will slides down onto the righted space. They don facemasks in tandem and tug their hoods up over their caps while peering out of their respective windows. With the close clear, they open the doors and step out into the empty street. With another vigilant glance around them, Hannibal heads over to the parked van with Will following.

Oiseau

Chapter Notes

> Chapter intended to be read to Sara'h's French cover of 'For You' by Rita Ora and Liam Payne: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmBe6zYoUHo

It is a short drive to the restaurant on a mostly empty road. Pulling up at the underground entrance just before 2am, Hannibal adjusts his cap and facemask. Exchanges glances with Will before getting out of the van.

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When the driver door shuts, Will turns his eyes back out the window. Scouring the nondescript walls for anything that could resemble hidden CCTV, he thinks about the conversation they had on their way here.
You should wait for me outside."
"Why?"
"One of us should keep watch."
"You think I'm going to mess up in there."
"Neither of us know what to expect when we enter the premises-"
"Exactly. So why does it matter?"
Pause.
"Is there more to the plan that you haven't told me?"
"No."
"Sure? Because it's either that or you think I won't be able to handle myself without you holding my hand."
"I have never attempted to hold your hand."
"No. Just other things."
Pause.
"It is unnecessary for both of us to become damsels."
"You mean you want me to come save your ass."
"Should that become a necessity, I would be most grateful."

Hannibal's last words, slipping quiet and flirtatious through the mask, had managed to temporarily abate his grumblings. Underneath, however, he continues to dwell on his misgivings. Attempts to alleviate some of them by telling himself that the enemy *likes* Hannibal. It's *him* they have an issue with. That it's likely the other would fare better than himself if apprehended. *If* apprehended. He has already decided he will buy Hannibal – or rather, the man will buy himself – a few rounds of Rusty Nails if he gets back in the van unscathed. Any alternative will see him drowning his sorrows at the hotel bar as he waits for Chiyoh to come and show him a selfie of Hannibal with the woman. Smiling that smile and looking like he's having the time of his life.

****

Loading the boxes onto the sack truck, he keeps his head down whilst wheeling them up to the steel door. With a quick flash of the proximity card, he's in and travelling his way down a lit and sterile

looking corridor as the door shuts behind him. A quick glance up past the edge of his cap gives him bare walls and ceilings. No conspicuous cameras in sight. At the end of the passage, he rounds the corner and comes upon an open area housing three large cold rooms. Setting down the sack truck, he approaches the nearest one and holds the card over the reader until a green dot blinks and white light illuminates the square window in the door. Looking in, he sees a deep space flanked on the right by rows of tall, empty mobile basket trolleys, and stainless steel shelving on the left sitting equally unoccupied – with the exception of four large heavy duty plastic crates. Arranged in a row on the bottom shelf closest to the far wall, their unmarked lids rouse his curiosity enough so that he opens the door and steps inside. Indifferent to the cool temperature, he makes his way towards the containers and squats down before them. Puts his hands on one of the lids. As he's about to lift it, a thud makes him pause.

Eyes lifting to the wall in front of him, he straightens up and walks back to the door. When he steps out, he sees the light has come on in the neighbouring cold rooms, and glances around him. Slowly, he steps up to the white square. Looks through the window. And sees a bound woman lying on her side upon the floor. From this angle, he can only see the top of her blonde head as she struggles to sit up. Beside her, a boy is on his knees, shifting against similar confines trapping his hands behind his back and binding his ankles together. His brown hair is mussed, and there are tears making tracks to the gag that Hannibal imagines to be muffling whimpers of fear. Sensing eyes on them, the child looks towards the window, and Hannibal steps aside before he can be spotted. Finds himself stood before the final door. Turning his face, he looks into the light. His pupils constricting against the angry glare of martyrdom resurrected.

****

He holds his breath when he sees the steel door opening. As his familiar figure walks out, Will sags against the seat with a sigh of relief, hand moving to his masked face then dropping instead to grip the gear stick. Nothing follows Hannibal through the door, and when it closes, Will turns a vigilant eye on their surroundings while the other jogs towards him. He starts the engine as the passenger door opens and Hannibal slides down onto the seat. Before the door is even shut, Will pulls away with more force than necessary and, having spent the last few minutes going through the directions in his head, starts driving towards their agreed meeting point.
"My phone, please," says Hannibal.
Keeping his eyes on the road, he sticks his hand into his trouser pocket. Pulls out the cell and holds it in Hannibal's direction. It is taken without a word, and Will glances askance to that impassive expression. All the more, perhaps, if something is amiss. He tugs down the mask.
"Did they see you?"
Hannibal tugs down his own and presses the phone to his ear.
"I believe they were expecting us," he answers.
"Shit," Will curses under his breath.
"Chiyoh."
The relief in Hannibal's voice, however faint, does not go unnoticed, and Will knits his brow as he listens.
"We are on the way. Be careful. I believe they were expecting us. If you suspect anything is out of the ordinary, do not wait."
In his peripheral vision, he sees the phone being lowered.
"Is she in danger?" he asks as they approach a red light.
The question remains unanswered as they pull to a stop. Clutching anxiously at the wheel, Will stares ahead into the night.
"Are *we* in danger?" he asks.
"Would you be surprised if we are?" asks Hannibal in return.
"No," says Will lowly, turning his face to watch that calm profile. "But sometimes I'd rather you

courted me instead of danger."

****

Dans tes yeux
Je revis

Smiling at that anxious glare, he lids his eyes, paralysed unexpectedly by the sweet pain of the arrowhead.

Tu es si beau de l'interieur
Un ange venu d'ailleurs

"They are one and the same to me," he says quietly, and as that frown deepens, so too does he feel the shaft sinking beyond his grasp until, like a huntsman's hurried attempt to spear the target before it scarpers, he moves.

Je suis chez moi
Quand je suis ici

****

Chaque larme
Chaque peur

Will feels a hand slipping onto his nape as Hannibal suddenly leans towards him. Caps clashing, he feels lips on his. The contact chaste and fleeting. Gone before he has time to react.

S'en vont quand je pense a toi
Et tout ce en quoi je crois

"It's green."

Tearing his eyes from that inscrutable profile, he tugs his cap back into place and faces the front.

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A jamais tu auras mon coeur

With Will's attention back on the road, Hannibal lifts his eyes to the rear-view mirror. Sees her sitting in the middle of the backseat, chin in hand. Smiling.

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Libre comme un oiseau dans ta cage

Chiyoh is looking more like Chiyoh the next time they reconvene. Having disposed of what turns out to be a wig and the heavy makeup, her barefaced stoicism takes Will back again to Molly's doorstep. And yet she is far more than just Hannibal's messenger. A guardian angel of sorts, she plays the supporting role that Bedelia had done when they were in Paris. The role he laments not having played himself when it came to saving the other's life. Suddenly, the woman's words echo within him. *I would very much like to know what it is that makes you stay*. Followed by Hannibal's reply: *he makes a good travel companion*. Which was a blatant lie when he has been nothing but the opposite. "Assuming this to be your neck of the woods, I suppose you have some people on speed dial should

anything happen to him," he mutters as he gets changed on the backseat while Chiyoh drives them away from the van and the man she left sitting comatose behind the wheel.
"Are you planning on running away?" she asks and Will concentrates on tugging his shirt into place.
"So what's the plan," he says, ignoring the question.
"We wait," says Hannibal.

Je plonge dans l'ocean et je nage

Glancing up, he watches the other in the rear-view mirror. Those hooded eyes downcast as he buttons up his shirt. And for a second time that night, Will wants Hannibal alone to ask him things. *What is it?* Yet knows better than to expect a straight answer. Maybe he'll be more inclined to share with his trusted assistant present, Will thinks a tad bitterly to himself.
"What did you find?" he asks, comforted by the sight of Chiyoh glancing askance at Hannibal, and the thought of her waiting similarly for some light to be shed on the man's thoughts. When silence ensues, he sees her dark eyes returning to the road. Watches Hannibal smoothing down the front of his shirt as he gazes out the window and almost leans forward to put a hand on his shoulder, and his lips to the shell of his ear before murmuring an encouraging *hey*. *Talk to me*.

Je saigne d'amour
Je t'ai dans mes veines

Still bristling beneath his clothes from Chiyoh's question, he supposes it makes no difference whether or not she hears him voice his concerns. The woman doesn't seem to think him capable. He doesn't even know himself if he is. But he'll be damned if Hannibal Lecter isn't.

Viens je t'emmene

****

J'ai attendu toute une vie pour toi

Standing in the middle of the elevator, Will glances askance at Hannibal. Mussed from wearing the cap, his fair hair sits uncombed and askew over his eyes as he stands there with his hands in his trouser pockets.
"Said I'd buy you a drink if you got back in the van," he utters, returning his gaze to the doors.
"Did you?" says Hannibal with mild interest.
"Yeah."
"I don't think I heard you."
"You weren't there. It was just a wager."
Pause.
"With myself."
"Ah."
A brief silence falls upon them until it is broken by the soft ding announcing their departure. Exchanging glances with Chiyoh, Will walks out after Hannibal and watches over his shoulder until her face disappears behind the closing doors.

J'ai arrete le temps juste pour toi

****

Et sans chercher l'amour je t'ai trouve

Sat in the chair, Will watches Hannibal's back as he pours them a drink. When he turns around, he is only carrying the one glass. Looking up as the other approaches, he finds Hannibal avoiding his gaze still.
"Thanks," he utters, taking the glass and lifting it to his lips for a sip as he follows him back to the minibar with his eyes. Observes the man facing him with his back again while pouring a glass for himself and proceeding to down its contents whilst standing. Lowering his own glass, he listens to the quiet sound of gulping until he grows uneasy sitting alone and must stand.

Mais jamais je n'aurais imagine

****

Sur ta peau
Je me vois

When he has swallowed down the last of the wine, he tells Will what he found in the cold rooms. As expected, questions are immediately fired his way, outraged and incredulous after the initial shock, during which he begins to pour himself another glass.

Je sens ton baiser sur moi
Ce qu'il y a de plus beau

Given the chance to respond, he does so in the affirmative, and in the silence that follows, he can feel those eyes boring into his back as he sips on the wine. When Will finally speaks again, his voice is slow and dangerously low.
"What game is she playing at...?"

A jamais, je serai a toi

The anxious note of his voice, wrapped in velvet fury, is pleasing to Hannibal. Despite the perilous trajectory of the conversation, he wishes for more.

Libre comme un oiseau dans ta cage

"I suspect she will make you choose," he says quietly into the glass.
"Jack pursued us knowing the risks," Will forces the words through his teeth. "That was *his* choice. *Not* theirs-"
"It sounds like you have already chosen," he interrupts him calmly.

Je plonge dans l'ocean et je nage

Turning around, he lifts his gaze to that look of horror. Stares into those blue depths burning bright with anger and fear. The burgeoning eyes of a wolf being backed into a corner.

Je saigne d'amour
Je t'ai dans mes veines

"We have to break them out," says Will, looking away as he begins to pace with his hands on his hips.
"They will likely be expecting us," says Hannibal, eyes lidding as he watches the other's restless movements.

Viens je t'emmene

“So alert the authorities-”
"It’s likely she’ll have them relocated if she hasn’t done so already.”
“Goddamnit-”
“She could punish us by punishing them. Not a risk I imagine you’d want to take.”
No response.
“And who’s to say she hasn’t bought the authorities.”

J'ai attendu toute une vie pour toi

Will stops. He turns around.

J'ai arrete le temps juste pour toi

Hannibal remains impassive as he basks in the heated vehemence of those eyes staring searchingly into him.

Et sans chercher l'amour je t'ai trouve

Feels his lashes lowering against the smoulder as Will narrows his eyes. His jaw flexing before he speaks.

Mais jamais je n'aurais imagine

“He’s here, isn’t he?” Will asks in syllables once more slow and loaded with the threat of an aggressive outburst.
“I wouldn’t be surprised.”
“He was at the club.”
“Perhaps.”
“You were meeting him.”
“If he had been on the premises, I was not aware of it.”
“Like you weren’t aware of him keeping Jack under our noses.”
“Yes.”
“And handing him over to them.”
“We don’t know the terms under which that may have occurred. If it occurred.”
“Are you helping them?” Will asks, voice dropping suddenly to a half whisper. His face pinched with fear.
“No.”
“How do I know that?”
“What would be my motive?”
“To hurt me?” Will struggles to utter, and Hannibal can see a shimmering beginning in those wide staring eyes.

Libre comme un oiseau dans ta cage

“Would I need to go to such an extent?”
“You tell me,” says the other angrily, looking ready to be overwhelmed by his own doubt.
Putting down his glass, Hannibal slips his hands into his trouser pockets and starts to walk away. As he passes, a hand grabs him by the arm. Its fingers closing hard around his bicep. Hannibal glances down at them.

Je plonge dans l'ocean et je nage

“I could have said yes to him,” he says coolly. “To fulfil such a motive.”
“But it’s not enough,” says Will accusatorily.
“Because I’m a masochist and actively seek punishment for my compassion?”
“You said I misunderstood-”
“Perhaps I did.”
“What does that mean?”

Je saigne d'amour
Je t'ai dans mes veines

“To think you could ever find it within you to truly accept me,” says Hannibal, looking up at him. Will hesitates, seemingly unable to find the words fast enough.

Viens je t'emmene

“This is the risk you agreed to take by choosing to be with-”
He stops and pulls his arm smoothly from the other’s grip.
“When you chose not to kill us,” he says instead as he continues on his way to the other side of the room. Stopping before the windows, he runs a hand through his hair. “If we play their games well, perhaps nobody will get hurt.”
“And if I just walk away?”

J'ai attendu toute une vie pour toi

He meets Will’s gaze in the glass.

J'ai arrete le temps juste pour toi

“Regardless, there is no guaranteed safety for those you care for,” he says, eyes averting. “If Mohamed is playing his own game with our hostess, it is my belief he is only lending a hand in order to bring us further under his mercy. He has no loyalty to anyone but his own interests.”
“You.”
He feels eyes watching him.
“It’s you they all want,” Will adds lowly.

Et sans chercher l'amour je t'ai trouve

Lifting his gaze, he meets that frown in the glass.
“Are you serving lamb, Will?” he says quietly.

Mais jamais je n'aurais imagine

Atsiprašymas

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jack is alive.

How, he doesn't know. Neither does he know how the enemy has managed to get hold of Molly and Walter. *These people*… He doesn't know who these people – Mohamed, the 'brothers', the 'hostess' – really are. *How* they have the means and resources to turn the world into their personal playground. Why they appear so intent on punishing him whilst revering Hannibal.

Standing behind the other, staring at that impassive expression reflected in the glass, he feels the ground giving way to turbulence, and wraps his arms around himself. Swallows against the burning truth that threatens to rise like bile up his throat. The fact that, despite knowing there would be consequences, he chose this. Chose them. And now, those consequences have caught up with him before he is ready, before he has faced it for longer than a heartbeat, making it impossible to continue turning a blind eye to the notion that maybe – perhaps *more* than *likely* – he had made a mistake the night they fell from the bluff.

I should've gone through with it. Made sure we never surfaced.

And Hannibal has been waiting all along. And all of this is just *another* test to prove their partnership within a world of elevated psychopaths will not be possible until he has lost all sense of human compassion for the rest of mankind. Even now he remains haunted by the voice that has always been there in the back of his mind. Muted whenever he allows himself to drown in the unspeakable, be it the blood of their victims or of each other. When their words are daggers but their bodies one. But he can still hear it in the silence of their inconvenient compassion. *This isn't sustainable*.

"Are you serving lamb, Will?" he hears Hannibal say, and feels his frown deepening. Beyond the glass, the city is asleep. He wishes they were too instead of facing what feels like the inevitable.
"Giving you to these people won't make this world right," he utters, averting his gaze.
"A world which isn't Rome. And you are not their Aeneas."
Will watches the floor.
"I asked you to leave with me, but you insisted on staying."
Quietly bitter.
"Sounds familiar."
Gently flippant.
"So we're just going to spend the remainder of our lives living in the past?" scoffs Will in exasperation.
"The past was easy," says Hannibal, his casual scepticism galling him the more until he must take a restless step forward.
"*I'm* not the one making it difficult," says Will through his teeth, hands darting to his hips as he glares at the other's reflection.
"On the contrary."
He watches Hannibal turn his back to the window. Hooded eyes meeting his as he stands across from him with his hands in his trouser pockets.
"You want me, you don't want me. A little consistency would be nice, even for a booty call."
Will frowns harder at those deliberate words. At that feigned look of indifference.
"If you gave us time to work things out instead of constantly throwing us into hot water," he hisses,

taking another step forward. Breaching personal space.
“I guess you gave me PTSD,” says Hannibal, face turning to the side upon his approach, and Will scoffs again as he hangs his head and shakes it slowly.
“I gave you.”
“Yes.”
“And what about the last however many years of my life spent dealing with your bullshit?”
“Is that what you call it.”
Will leans in. His voice quiet and low with frustration.
“Plastering it with Greek poetry doesn’t make it exalted.”
Black meets blue from the corners.
“It just takes your shit to a whole new level,” he continues to say, and at such close proximity, he can see very clearly the subtle narrowing of those hooded eyes.
“You make me question my compassion.”
The simple statement cuts deep, and before Will realises, he is half growling into the other’s face:
“Well *you* make it *impossible*-”

The words catch in his throat the same time Hannibal faces him.

++++

He watches Will until the other turns his face away. Hand running frustratedly through those curls. The phone rings. Hannibal walks towards the minibar. Opening it, he stares through his lashes at its contents. As he listens to the sound of feet making their way towards the handset, he removes another bottle. It is heavy in his hand. And for a moment, he considers testing its weight on the back of Will’s skull.

++++

Walking to the phone, he tries to regain some of his composure. He hates the tumultuous waves of self-loathing and guilt rolling over him every time the other brings up the past. Hates how much they seem so anchored by it that the very notion of freeing themselves, of the danger to follow in floating separate and adrift, now fills him with terror.

But most of all, he hates how conspicuous it is to outsiders. As though they can see the albatross hanging from his neck. The weight of which they seem to enjoy testing within their palms following a leisurely sleight of hand. Yet Hannibal doesn’t appear to mind, continuing to drag Will through the coals for trying to kill them when it feels increasingly to Will like the man is growing restlessly adamant in driving them full throttle off the goddamn edge himself. *This isn’t sustainable.*

Suddenly, his own words come back to him from the bluff. *Maybe I can’t save myself. Maybe that’s fine*. Followed by the other’s chosen response that night. A passage from the Bible referring to friendship. How hopeful Hannibal had looked in the bloody aftermath. How foolish he must have felt afterwards. *What if he has enough?* Will struggles to put an end to these thoughts as he stops before the phone. *What if he decides to cut himself free last minute to swim to more welcoming shores?*

The ringing continues. Taking a silent breath, he picks up the receiver. Lifts it to his ear.

++++

“Ingredients,” scoffs Will disdainfully.
Sitting down on the edge of the bed, Hannibal drinks slowly from the glass, listening to the other’s voice. Low and taut as he speaks down the phone. A string to be plucked by a perfectly manicured finger.

“What happens after I’ve made my choice?” asks Will slowly, and Hannibal can feel the heat of struggle bleeding through the feigned coldness of his tone as the man tries his best to mask his discomfort. Imagines her red lipped smile on the other end.

When silence hangs in the air, he looks up to see Will listening closely. Standing there tensely with his hand on his hip. His curls tossed. The very picture of anxiety that he will never tire of watching.

A grimace suddenly pinches that face. Those dark eyebrows knitting together as lips part then remain agape a beat longer before the receiver is slotted back into place.

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Now that you have seen the ingredients, Mr Graham, which would you prefer to use.
Hannibal had been right to say they were being watched.
What happens after I’ve made my choice?
Just as he had been right to say she would make him choose.
They shall be released. Was the answer. The simplicity of her words adding to his vexation. *Right now, in fact*. A promise he doesn’t know what to do with.

After the phone cuts off, he looks for Hannibal and finds him sat on the edge of the bed, nursing a glass of wine. Hooded eyes half drawn and staring at nothing in particular. As he sips slowly on his beverage, Will paces over to sit down beside him. Almost expects the other to ask him how their hostess is. *I think maybe she had intentions of pushing me out of that plane the first time she saw us together*. Leaving his memory of the gallery, he thinks of the apartment and his distorted voice. Wants to ask if he has anything for the intense fear coming in waves.

++++

Watching the dark pool at the bottom of his glass, he touches the rim with his finger.
“You were asked to choose,” he says quietly.
“She’s already chosen for me.”
Hannibal doesn’t say anything at the sardonic remark.
“Said they’ll be released,” Will continues to utter, the hushed quality of his voice reminding Hannibal of a gritty mixture being forced through muslin. “That she’d love for them to be at the banquet.”
He lifts the glass.
“That’s nice.”
Takes a sip.
“Is it.”
Swallowing, he lowers the glass and keeps his eyes on the dwindling contents.
“Would you have chosen differently?” he asks.
“Did I really have a choice?”
He glances askance at Will. Finds him staring at the space in front of him. A mixture of exhaustion. Frustration.

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A moment of silence as they sit there on the bed without a masterpiece to stare at.
“Are you going to kill them?” he asks eventually.
“Who.”
“Molly and Walter.”
“Would that make you love me?”
Pause.
Will looks at the man sat beside him. Looks away again at the door.

“I suppose *they’d* love it if I murdered my own wife and child,” he scoffs quietly in the attempt to detract from his surprise at the frankness of the question. “Though not as much as they seem to love you…”
“Do you feel unpopular, Will.”
The sound of his voice speaking his name is comforting despite everything, and he takes a deep breath.
“Like I’m trying to get you hitched despite the wishes of your family,” he exhales.
“Are we not family?”
Will licks his lips.
“We fight like one,” Hannibal continues to say.
Swallowing, Will lowers his gaze as he hunkers down, arms folding upon his thighs.
“Would it not make you proud,” he utters. “Watching me butcher Jack.”
“I do what I do because I want to.”
Slowly, Will looks over at him from the corners of his eyes. Hannibal has the almost empty glass lifted to his lips.
“The heart cannot be forced,” he adds softly, his words almost disappearing into the last of his drink.
Will opens his mouth but hesitates when he sees hooded eyes dropping to the floor.
“I’m sorry,” says Hannibal.
Will feels his brow knotting. Turns his own troubled gaze back to the door.
“…what for,” he mutters.
Silence. When it becomes clear that Hannibal is not going to answer, Will takes another deep breath. Lets it out.
“…I’m sorry too.”
Pause.
“For accusing you.”
“Even if I have a part to play in all this?”
“You’re just being you.”

++++

He looks at Will, and Will looks at him. As he stares at that face, he is struck by the sudden need to turn his own away. Eyes closing, he sees Abigail. Standing there in the kitchen with her back to him. He walks up behind her. Puts his hand over hers before the knife’s edge touches the cake. *If you cut away what makes Will, Will…*

++++

He averts his own gaze when Hannibal looks away, jaw clenching as he swallows against the rising tide.
“I want you to do what you do because you want to,” says the other eventually. “Not because you have to.”
A pause as he considers those words, unable to help frowning as they settle heavy on him like a sodden blanket. The uncomfortable weight of his kindness.
“Easy for me to say, perhaps.”
At the gentle and inviting sound of his voice, Will looks over once more.
“I have neither wife nor child,” Hannibal continues to say. Sitting there with his eyes downcast, holding an empty glass between his hands, the man looks unbearably alone, whether or not he is conscious of the response he has induced. Swallowing, Will licks his lips. Leans closer to the other as he opens his mouth.

The phone rings.

++++

“Who is it?” Will asks even though they both know who it must be. In the pause, Hannibal watches the other standing there with the receiver pressed once more to his ear, and thinks of them in the cold room. Of the child’s frightened eyes. “I’ll be down,” Will continues to say, looking over at him. As he puts the receiver back, Hannibal slowly stands.
“They’re here?” he asks.
“Yes,” Will answers, as though not quite believing it himself, one hand running through his hair and remaining caught in those haphazard curls as he turns on the spot. His blue eyes searching the floor until Hannibal can no longer bear it.
“Bring them up, Will,” he says gently, waiting for that distracted gaze to meet his before adding, “I promise not to harm them.”
“I…” the man utters falteringly, and Hannibal slips his hands into his trouser pockets.
“I’ll wait with Chiyoh. You may call her room when you’re ready.”

After Will leaves the room, he collects the necessities and, venturing out into the corridors, makes his way down via the stairway. By the time he reaches the bottom, he sees the lobby is clear, and walks straight to the doors. Stepping out, he makes his way over to the taxi rank. Climbs into the lone taxi parked there, and pulls the door shut. He tells the driver the destination, then leans back against the seat as they pull away from the curb. Taking out his cell, he calls her number. She answers immediately.
“Chiyoh. I’m going to see her. I need you to do something for me.”
Pause as she waits. She most likely already knows what his request will be.
“Watch over them while I’m away, please.”
Another pause. He can see the lowering of her dark eyes despite the stoic front.
“Will you be returning?” she asks.
“I intend to,” he answers.

Hanging up, he turns his face to look out the window. Sees her reflection in the glass. Her head on his shoulder as those blue eyes look up at him. *I have no right to ask for your forgiveness*. She shifts her head to get more comfortable, and he is reminded of not being able to reach up and stroke her long brown hair. The regret will haunt them for the rest of their lives. Yet in this guilt, they will never truly be removed from one another.

She closes her eyes. As does he.

Chapter End Notes

Translation:

“Atsiprašymas” - "Sorry"

Chasteneth

Chapter Notes

> Chapter intended to be read to Trap Nation's remix of Hislerim by Serhat Durmus:
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTMjsgS_c9M

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They stand together in the intimate space of the elevator. Beside him, Molly is clasping Wally to her. His face turned away from Will. His mother’s head bowed. Her eyes closed. Turning his own gaze to the closed doors before them, Will looks down as he waits. His hands hanging empty and heavy at his sides.

When they come to a stop and the doors slide open, he steps out and slowly begins walking. Sensing their absence, he stops and looks back. Molly looks up just as the doors begin to slide. Before they shut her and Wally from view, she reaches up a hand to grab the edge of the door, reversing the mechanism and sending a wave of relief and devastation washing over him in equal bouts.

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Holding the door open, he watches them walk inside and cannot remember if it had been this spotless before he left. With no visible signs of use, he almost mistakes it for a different room entirely. Pushes

down the rising paranoia of abandonment as he closes the door and gently tells his wife to take a seat. He waits until she has sat down on the edge of the bed with Wally before moving to join them. Sitting down beside her, he keeps his gaze on the floor. For a while, nobody says anything as Molly presses her cheek to her son's head and strokes his hair comfortingly. When she finally speaks, her words are quiet, yet all the more arresting in their ability to transport Will back to all those nights she had confided in him. Waiting patiently for him to do the same.
"After you left, I started to wonder if we had been visited by a ghost."
He watches the floor as she continues to speak.
"I was so happy to see you. It was the best gift."
"I ruined your Christmas," he states, voice hushed with self-loathing.
"No you didn't," she exhales. "It was silly of me to think you'd be staying."
Swallowing, he hangs his head.
"I had to go…" he utters.
"I know."
"I wouldn't have if I'd known it meant endangering you and Wally."
"Are we in danger, Will?"
At the familiar address, he forces himself to look at her. Can barely hold the weight of those blue eyes as she regards him, undeserving as he is of her willingness to understand even when her safety and that of her child have been compromised by the one she loves without prejudice. The irony of him accusing Hannibal of being undeserving of Chiyoh's loyalty hits him hard.
"I won't let anything happen to you or Wally," he says, brow knitting. Scoffing gently, Molly looks down at Wally's hair as she strokes her fingers through the soft, dark tresses.
"We're in Tokyo, Will," she says lowly. "I mean, Wally's always wanted to come, but not as a hostage," she adds.
"You're not hostages," he says, unable quite to mask the misery in his syllables, and feels a hand moving over his upon the bed.
"If I could free you from this thing you're chasing, I would."
He looks down at their hands resting between them.
"I still love you," she says, her voice quiet and self-deprecating, as though she is berating herself for the fact. "We both do."
The kindness paralyses him so that he continues to sit there mutely as Molly continues to say:
"If we make it home-"
"It's likely you will have to come under protection," he interrupts her reluctantly.
"When it's all over, then," she says. "We'll go home. Together. If that's what you want."
He feels her gaze on his face. Swallows.
"I'm going to use the bathroom."
Her hand moves away and he watches Molly slowly stand while giving Wally a reassuring squeeze to the shoulder. The boy watches after his mother as Will turns his eyes on his step-son. When the bathroom door shuts, Will takes a breath and releases it quietly into the silence between them.
"Hey," he murmurs, putting a gentle hand on the child's back.
"If you really cared about us," Wally begins to say in a small voice. "You would let us go."
Will studies that troubled profile a beat longer before lowering his gaze.
"I need to know you and your mother will be safe," he says.
"We won't be if we stay with you."
He looks up at those words. Sees the contortion in that young brow.
"You know dangerous people," Wally continues to say. Afraid and accusatory. The sound of his voice making Will lean closer to the son whose life he had chosen to be a part of and yet abandoned so easily.
"I won't let them-"
"How?" Wally cries hoarsely all of a sudden, turning his face to stare at Will. His wavering eyes narrowing with doubt. "What will you do?" he asks weakly, half choking on burgeoning tears.

“Hey,” says Will, hand slipping up to clasp the child’s nape, his touch seemingly unregistered as the first rivulet runs its course.
“Where were you when they took us?” the boy continues to ask as he sits there, hands clasped tight in his lap. Looking as alone as Hannibal had earlier. Frowning at the memory and the thought of being the cause of their aggrievement, Will struggles to find the words.
“Wally…”
“You weren’t there-”
“I’m sorry-”
“You’re never there,” Wally sobs quietly, voice breaking as he hunches his shoulders and hangs his head. Letting out a shaky breath, Will puts his arm around his son. Pulls him hard against himself and feels Wally pressing his face into his chest.
“I’m scared, dad.”
The whisper is muffled by his shirt, yet he feels the heat of uneven breaths seeping through the material alongside the tears. Holding him close, Will thinks of hooded eyes. Downcast and unreadable as the man apologised, seemingly in earnest. Expressing regret even if he has a part to play in all of this. *And what of my part?*

As the bathroom door opens, the phone suddenly starts ringing. Looking at Will, then at her son, Molly moves towards them the same time Will takes Wally by the arms and slowly eases him back. Forcing a weak smile of encouragement, he gives the boy’s hair a gentle ruffle.
“It’s going to be okay,” he says before exchanging glances with Molly and letting her take his place as he stands and makes his way over to the phone.

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He follows the man down an elegant yet dimly lit corridor. His eyes on the combed back tresses of the undercut pompadour directly ahead of him. As he walks, he brings his gaze down to those broad shoulders. Measures its span while taking into account that lumbering gait. Recognises it just as he recognises his eyes. Peering out at him and Will from under a furred hood. His beard has gone, however. The great weight of it having masked a somewhat boyish jawline. He recalls how both this man and his ‘twin’ had stooped to avoid drawing attention to their full stature all that time they stood together on the rock formation. Or when they were hobbling on the side of the road. Waiting for them to pass by in their car. Now, as though endowed with the confidence of being in familiar territory, the man stands straight enough for Hannibal to estimate a height difference of a good few inches.

Reaching the end of the corridor, the man – Antonios, as he had introduced himself upon the grounds of the Holy Trinity monastery – stops by an open doorway. Turning around, he clasps his hands before him while staring stoically at Hannibal through half-drawn eyes. Stopping short of the doorway, he tilts his head curiously at the other.
“Where is your beard,” he asks in Russian. Those lips lift subtly at the corner.
“Gone,” answers the other in accented English. “Where is your friend?”
Choosing not to answer, Hannibal glances towards the doorway.
“Please,” says Antonios, unclasping and holding his hand out to the side. “She is waiting for you.”

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Picking up the phone, he presses it to his ear.
“He left,” says Chiyoh.
His breath catches in his throat.
Left.
“But he plans to return.”
On his own.

“If he takes too long, I’m heading out.”
“Where?” he asks, finding his voice.
“The restaurant.”
Exhaling, he keeps his back to his family as he closes his eyes and presses his hand over them.
“How long is too long,” he murmurs.
“Depends on who is asking the question.”
She knows.
“I’ll let you know.”
That every passing second spent not knowing where he is, what he is doing…
“Just don’t leave without me,” he says before hanging up.

++++

The room is spacious, with minimalist décor. Yet even with its row of floor length windows, the black walls are closing in upon the glaringly bright furniture comprising almost exclusively of white leather and polished mirror surfaces. At the far end of the room, past the open drinks cabinet and long white shelves laden with various books and sculptures, he sees her in a state of recline upon a spotlessly white chaise lounge. A pair of delicate gold reading glasses perched on the bridge of her nose as she scrutinises the open pages of a magazine held up to her face. When he enters her territory, Antonios follows, posing as a barrier between Hannibal and the doorway. The man offers to take his coat, which Hannibal relinquishes having read the silent threat behind the courteous gesture. Tugging on his cuffs from beneath the sleeves of his suit jacket, he exchanges glances with the man. Antonios pulls back the edge of his own suit jacket to show Hannibal his firearm. Unbuttoning his suit jacket, Hannibal shows Antonios his lack of one.
“Do you wish to pat me down?” he asks casually in Russian, and the other smiles politely.
“No.”
Buttoning back up, he proceeds to make his way towards her as the other follows at a few paces behind.

She continues reading as he approaches, and does not look up when he lowers himself into the nearby armchair. Waiting for her acknowledgement, he listens to the subtle sound of a stopper leaving its decanter in the background, followed by the quiet tinkle of glassware.
“Zeus allowed Hades to have Persephone a month for each seed consumed,” she begins to muse aloud, voice slipping past her red lips in a low murmur. “While she sits beside Hades in the Underworld, the earth is cold and barren. Once Persephone is reunited with her mother, the land is warm and rich with fertility. Thus, the Greeks explained the phenomenon of seasonal change.”
He continues to observe that thoughtful expression as her bodyguard ventures forth to offer him a beverage. Turning his eyes on the glass of wine, he lifts a hand to receive it. Watches Antonios step across to press its twin with practised ease into the splayed fan of her fingers sitting poised and expectant. Lifting the glass to his nose, he breathes in the richness of the notes. *Pomegranates.*
“Typical Zeus turns himself into a snake, of course, and has his way with Persephone,” she chuckles before lifting the rim to her lips. Taking a measured sip from his own glass, Hannibal swallows and tilts his head.
“Their child was eaten by the Titans,” he says offhandedly.
“And the vengeful Zeus struck them down as a result.”
“From the mingled ashes came forth men into the world,” he adds idly to her retelling, watching those grey eyes feigning preoccupation as they remain on the page of her magazine.
“Thus the Greeks explained the phenomenon of good and evil. Born nevertheless from great acts of cruelty.”
The magazine lowers and she looks up at him for the first time since his arrival. Holding that cool, unblinking stare, he sits back slowly against the luxurious upholstery.
“You wish to see what he is capable of,” he says.

“You wish to see it again,” she says, smiling shrewdly.
Upholding his side of the staring contest, he nonetheless fails to stop the voice uttering echoingly from an empty corridor of his mind palace, *I glimpsed greatness and it almost destroyed me*. As though able to trace the voice back to its origins, her smile deepens.
“Stay,” she says simply. “Observe.”
“Great art cannot be forced,” he parries calmly. “This is true even of the Masters.”
“I prefer *inspired*,” she says, smiling still. “By that which has the means to move us *most* deeply…”
“So you made his choice for him,” he says.
“I *anticipated* his choice,” she corrects him cordially, removing her glasses as those eyes continue to bore into him. “As I anticipated you coming here tonight, under the guise of voicing your displeasure at not being involved in the selection process.” She tilts her head and strokes a golden temple tip against her bottom lip. “Correct me if I’m wrong,” she goes on to say, voice quiet and slow. “You alone could produce the most glorious reimagining of Truth Unveiled by Time. A version that speaks true to you as an artist, despite all compromise. The ultimate redemption in the eyes of The Establishment. And yet.” The intonation of her last two words openly suspicious as those fair lashes lower against self-possessed grey. “You wish to know as much as I do.” A brief pause is allowed before she adds perceptibly in a low voice, “Even if it means putting yourself at potential risk.”
“Am I in danger?” he asks.
“Are you in love, doctor?” she says with the faintest of smiles. “Such tumult and affliction have the means to elevate our art. Or destroy it.” The smile fades. “He that spareth his rod hateth his son…”
Thinking suddenly of Abigail, he pauses as grey eyes continue to stare into him. Needling the delicate fissure appearing in his mask.
“You wish you had spared her,” she murmurs. “Abigail Hobbs.”
The mention of her name prolongs his hesitation.
“You have allowed the regret of losing your surrogate child to weaken your resolve ever since,” she continues to say. “Yet he who loves him, chasteneth him betimes.”
“This is not guidance,” he objects in a quiet voice.
“Will Graham must learn the discipline of our practice.”
“He understands the principles-”
“The Establishment needs more than just empathy.”
She pauses, expression appearing to soften as she regards him.
“You need more than just empathy,” she says in hushed tones.
“I need you to understand there is method in what appears to be madness,” he says evenly.
“Or madness in your objection to the method,” she chuckles. “It remains my belief that you came here tonight to hand me the rod,” she adds casually as she returns her attention to the magazine. “And regardless of your umming and ahhing, I shall relieve you of your burden nonetheless. Leave it with me, Dr Lecter.”
He watches her slip on her glasses and resume her reading. When he makes to stand, Antonios steps forward from behind his chair. Straightening up, he looks the man in the eye.
“I wish to return to the hotel,” he says.
“There is no need,” he hears her murmur in a preoccupied voice. “I happen to possess some of the finest rooms in Tokyo.”

++++

Not long after he hangs up, the phone rings again, and he is notified of someone waiting for him in the lobby. Knowing it won’t be Hannibal, he doesn’t want to go down. Yet the subtle apprehension in the receptionist’s voice tells him he can’t just stay in the room. After explaining he’ll be on his way, he dials the number for Chiyoh’s room. Tells her, when she answers, that he’s going down to meet someone. Then, apologising to Molly, he tells her he will be right back, and that she shouldn’t open the door to anyone.
“Will.”

At the sound of her voice, he stops with his hand on the door handle and looks over his shoulder at their worried faces.
“Be careful,” she says.

The receptionist explains to Will that they are waiting in the hotel carpark. *They*. Suddenly aware of how alone he is, he turns from the desk with his hands on his hips, and closes his eyes. Grounding himself until the receptionist’s nervous voice interrupts to ask tentatively if he’s feeling well. *What’s that?*

It is early morning. Nearing 4am. The sky is still black and the air cold. Beneath the roof of the drop off zone, a car sits waiting, its sleek black body reflecting the glow of the yellow lighting above. Taking a breath, he pushes the rest of his way past the heavy entrance door and climbs down the steps. The windows of the Audi are blacked out, making it impossible to guess who could be watching from the other side. As he nears the vehicle, the rear chrome-trimmed window begins to wind down. The first glimpse of those black curls makes him want to turn around and walk back the way he came.
“Maljadeed.”
Jaw setting at the cocksure greeting, Will stares woodenly at the Egyptian.
“Why are you wearing shades at night,” he utters. A hand moves up, flashing him with a Rolex before fingers pinch and drag down the designer frame.
“Why do you look like shit?” Mohamed retorts as he gives Will a onceover. “I must protect my eyes,” he adds haughtily, pushing the sunglasses back in place before reclining against the leather upholstery.
“What do you want,” says Will.
The exterior of the car is buffed to such perfection that he can see his own crossed arms and the deep furrowing of his brow in the mirror effect.
“Our boy has gone to see her,” Mohamed explains. “Now he can’t leave.”
Our boy. Will holds his tongue as the man tilts his head and continues talking. “I want him back, of course.”
“So go get him.”
“I’m not the one who lost him.”
Will scoffs derisively.
“You mean you’re working together.”
“If that were the case, he’d be sitting next to me now,” says Mohamed breezily.
“I meant you and the woman,” says Will slowly. “You gave her Jack.”
“She wanted him fresh. For a five course meal.”
“Bullshit,” Will grits through his teeth, shoving his arm into the space of the car. As he grabs the other’s neck, he hears the sound of a cocking gun.
“I would show a little more respect, Mr Graham,” says the other coolly when Will lets go.
“Considering you’ll be on your knees soon,” he adds, running a hand through his curls as the window winds up. “Blowing for your life.”
Slamming his hand on the glass, Will grabs the door handle to find it locked. The car revs and rolls forward without warning, forcing him to let go. Righting himself from the stumble, he stands there watching the Audi drive off into the night. When it has disappeared from sight, he lets out a breath and gazes at the city before him through half-drawn eyes.

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The lobby is empty when he goes back inside. Even the receptionist has temporarily disappeared. Looking towards the lifts, he finds one of them standing with its doors open. Sees Chiyoh waiting for him inside and makes his way over.

“It was him,” he utters when the doors have slid to a close.
“I saw.”

“Said he can’t leave. Whatever that means.”
Chiyoh doesn’t comment.
“Why tell me this except to make us go to her? It’s a trap.”
“For who.”
Will glances askance at that expressionless profile.
“Why would he go to her alone if he considers her a threat.”
“Why do you think.”
To negotiate? He wouldn’t be so foolish… He must know that bastard is in on this, too.
He returns his gaze to the doors, and Hannibal’s words come back to him.
I want you to do what you do because you want to. Not because you have to.
“He’s a fool,” he says quietly.
“Maybe.”
They reach his floor and the doors slide open, but he stays inside until they close again and the elevator resumes its climb.
“You don’t suppose they’ll hurt him,” he utters aloud his doubt. *What am I supposed to believe?*
A beat. And then:
“What will you do?” she asks, echoing Walter, and Will recalls the conversation in the van. *It is unnecessary for both of us to become damsels. You mean you want me to come save your ass. Should that become a necessity, I would be most grateful*. Whether or not Hannibal has orchestrated this, he has to face him. *This way of living…*
“Ask for help,” he half whispers to himself.
“Mohamed would love that,” says Chiyoh flatly.
“I have no choice,” says Will quietly, thinking of the Egyptian and his Rolex. The men in his Audi. *I’m not one of the big players in this world*. The paucity of his resources in comparison is painfully stark, and he must swallow against the rising bitterness before he chokes on it.
I’m trying.
Blink back the sudden wavering.
But I can’t do it alone.
“Do you know his number?” he asks reluctantly.

Chapter End Notes

'Antonios' (6'3) and 'Nicholaos' (6'2) without their 'lumberjack' facial hair
Translation:

“Maljadeed” - "What's new?"

Hislerim - My feelings

My soul is reborn
But everything seems to be lost
So deep
My feelings

My shoulders heavy with burdens
But I won't give up
It's not over
It's not over
I'm not finished

I am not special or anything like that
But when you were here I always felt I was
I felt I was

Will everything be burned to ashes?
You remember that too
It is late
I felt that way

Scarab

Chapter Notes

Chapter intended to be read to 'All These Lies' by Desren: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPUhdVDYoCk

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stepping into the shower, he closes his eyes as the water beats down on his head. Braces his hand against the wall. *I asked you to leave with me, but you insisted on staying*. Sees his face. *I'm not the one making it difficult.* The hot rivulets sluice down his face, running into his parting lips. His eyes as they slowly slip open. *If you gave us time to work things out instead of constantly throwing us into hot water.*

Everything Will had said had been true. Everything she had said had also been true. *You have allowed the regret of losing your surrogate child to weaken your resolve ever since.* Barring one. *It remains my belief that you came here tonight to hand me the rod*. Their enemy has backed Will into a corner. While this ought to be exciting – her actions, similar to Mohamed's, keen to lend his curiosity an enthusiastic hand – something in him makes him hesitate. The same culprit that has been steering his recklessness for some time now. The *honeymoon period*, some may call it. Or a holiday in hell if you are Will. Standing under the cascade takes him back to his lonely exit that night in the rain. The bitter truth that he'd been changed, and how that change would prove irrevocable. *The arrow shot causes only destruction*. He gazes resignedly at the wall. If mankind will always yearn for that which makes them weak, he ought to climb from the masses to resume his place above. Yet he knows there is no longer an elevated space reserved for him. Instead, he must endure the pangs like the rest of them. Suffer this disease of the heart that has been romanticised since the beginning of time. When a man called Will Graham first crossed his path. And proceeded to walk with him.

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Leaving Molly and Walter resting in the bed, he steps out onto the balcony and pulls the door shut behind him. A glance at the chair makes him think of Hannibal, and wish he could return to that moment when, drunk and listless, the man would've been useless at stopping Will from calling a cab and hauling him into it. Making them board a plane. Any plane. The next flight out. Perhaps passing his wife and son in the air like ships in the night. *Selfish*. Face turning to the side at the thought of them behind the glass, his eyes fall back to the chair, and he sees him reclining with his eyes closed and robe open at the neck. The scar over his external jugular exposed to the cold night air. Slipping the phone from his trouser pocket, he is about to call him when it starts to ring. The lit screen showing a withheld number. Accepting the call, he presses the phone to his ear.
"Have you had the pleasure of visiting the Mori Art Museum, Mr Graham."
He faces the view of buildings stretching up into fading black. Tells her he has not.
"It is a museum that exhibits the work of local artists, though an exception appears to have been made."
"I want to speak to him."
"I'm afraid he's rather preoccupied at the moment."
"If you do anything," he begins to grit through his teeth when she smoothly interrupts him with a "I would hurry, Mr Graham. The exhibition is only temporary."
She ends the call and the sound of the night breeze suddenly returns. Lowering the phone, he thinks of the many conversations he's had with Hannibal. Of the man's promise of sparing him a deranged and solitary death. And the notion of security being the true downfall of man. Or at least, men like *him*. Taking a breath, he lets it out and looks down at the phone. Dials the number. And lifts it reluctantly back to his ear. The man picks up before the first ring is even made.
"I was right," says the Egyptian from the get-go. The smug tone of his voice needling Will through the speaker. "You're on your knees, are you not, my friend?"
Let's get this over with.
"I need your help," Will exhales, cursing Hannibal for the obscenity coming out of his mouth.
"Of course," says the man amiably. "If you say the magic word."
Go to hell. *In your language*.
"Well?"
Jaw flexing, he glares at the skyline before him.
"…please," he utters under his breath.
"Now what kind of a man cheats in an exam?" Mohamed shouts contemptuously down the phone, his sudden outburst making Will wince. Provoked, he fails to check his temper.
"You, you asshole," he hisses, turning restlessly on the balcony.
"I am an honourable man."
Will scoffs down the phone.
"And a genius," the voice continues to say.
"Right."
"Whereas you, my friend, are a spineless little pu-"
Will hangs up, glaring still at the sleeping city until, closing his eyes, he heaves a sigh and slowly opens them again. *When will you learn?*

Taking a step forward, he grips the top of the railing with his hands. Thinks about the passports her people had packed into Molly's handbag. One for her, one for Wally. One for him. They had looked every inch the real deal. Legitimate. Like the invite for him to check out of their playing field. To go home. It is a generous albeit galling gesture, and he considers instead the feasibility of getting his wife and son safely out of the country without anyone knowing. Alana comes to mind. And her fury, no doubt, at the notion of him bringing trouble once more to the door of their family estate. *Selfish*. Demanding to know why he has yet to kill Hannibal as well as himself. Inhaling, he holds his breath unconsciously as a thought bleeds from a dark corner of his brain. *If you died, there would be no*

reason for anyone to pursue them anymore. They would be free. And he would be free to join those twisted, self-righteous, self-conceited- He stops, thinking of the way the man had wept in his arms, and knowing his words are merely a reflection of his own jealous insecurities as opposed to what Hannibal himself would want. *Selfish*. Gripping the rail harder, he shuts his eyes and hangs his head. *I can't do that to him.*

The phone rings. He answers.
"I wanted to say before you so rudely hung up on me."
Will slowly straightens up as he waits for the other to continue.
"Your friend, Jack Crawford. He must die. Or your wife and child will," says the voice solemnly before reverting to its previous conceit. "In case you were thinking of dropping them off at the airport." It's possible to hear the man's smile through his words, and Will uses all his willpower not to launch the cell into the night. "I said she could have him as long as the man's imprisonment and death was guaranteed."
"Like an animal awaiting slaughter," Will utters seethingly through his teeth.
"So you do have an imagination."
He bites his tongue.
"Technically, she is bending my conditions. And Mohamed does not bend for anybody."
"You want me to kill Jack."
"The little scarab is on a roll tonight."
Will imagines that head of curls separated from its expensive suit. Rolling across the floor.
"How do I know you won't just kill them anyway."
The man curses down the phone. Whilst Will doesn't understand the words, he does understand the derogatory tone.
"What kind of a man harms women and children?"
Will says nothing as he stares flatly at the shifting silhouettes of trees below.
"There's no fun in that," the voice chuckles. "Now run along and bring home the bacon, kheper."

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The man was still there when he turned off the shower. Standing with his arms folded and legs apart as though to block the exit. As he stepped out the stall, he was ordered in Russian to show the other his asshole.
"Is that necessary?" he'd asked, glancing down at those gloved hands.
"Yes."
A brief staring contest had ensued, during which he'd decided against a tussle in the limited space and faced the wall obligingly - for the time being. Leant forwards while reaching back to grab his own cheeks. He'd felt eyes on his skin, and looked over his shoulder to see the man stepping forward to take over. One hand pinning back his buttocks as he pushed a thick digit up his passage. He'd grunted indignantly at the treatment, body clenching instinctively against the invasion, which only made the man probe him harder. Satisfied there was nothing hiding up there, he'd peeled off his gloves and disposed of them in the bin before telling Hannibal to follow him.

Walking out into the bedroom, he'd looked at the silk shorts and pyjamas lying on the bed, inhaling at the pretence of good hospitality before saying rather haughtily in Russian that he was under the impression the man was intending to put more than just a finger up his ass.
"Are you asking me to fuck you, doctor?"
At the question, Hannibal had turned his face to stare impassively at the other's look of indifference, and for a moment, stood across the other with his hand on the towel wrapped around his hips while the man clasped both of his in front of that doorman stance, he'd considered the possibility of being raped.
"Net, spasibo," he'd answered evenly, holding that nonchalant stare until the man grew bored and told

him to get dressed. As he did, he'd looked over the room discreetly, expecting further instructions since the other was stood waiting again. And sure enough, once he'd finished buttoning up the pyjama top, the man was back to giving orders.
"Lozhis na krovat."
"Pochemu?" he'd continued to retort in a mild voice. "Vy peredumali?"
When the other had started reaching for something behind his back, Hannibal had tried to dart past, only to find himself stopped in his tracks by a sharp hand to the throat. The struggle that followed had been enough to correct his mislabelling of the man as a lumbering idiot. But neither did he inflict unnecessary force upon Hannibal. Just enough to throw him onto the bed before attempting to handcuff both his wrists to the metal headboard. Despite having the one arm restrained, Hannibal had refused to make it easy for the other until the man grew wearisome of his efforts and resorted to plan B. As he'd lain on his front upon the cover beneath the hard press of his captor's knee, he'd felt the needle going in and the second dose being administered after he'd managed to dislodge the first. Had held that gaze defiantly until he lost the willpower to fight being pushed over onto his back and vaguely acknowledged the metal cuff closing about his other wrist before it joined its twin above his head.
"U tebya tverdaya golova," the man had chuckled, watching down at Hannibal as he removed a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe the blood from his nose. "Moya slozhneye," he'd added with a lofting of his brows. Under the increasing weight of his lashes, Hannibal had looked the other in the eye and muttered something in Russian about cracking the man's skull open and making an omelette with his brains. To which the response had been a warped *spasibo za ideyu* before the encroaching black consumed his tall figure.

The next time he opens his eyes, he sees someone leaning over him in the dark. Staring down. His face half lit by moonlight coming in through a gap in the drawn curtains. *Have you ever seen blood in the moonlight, Will?*
"The Greeks are dead."
His voice is hollow. His eyes black voids.
"Every last one."
Hannibal releases a soft, ragged breath. Feels liquid heat beginning to seep from the corners of his eyes.
"Mano aistringas berniukas," he whispers, sluggishly trying to move his hands and feeling the cold metal digging into his skin.
The familiar furrow appears in his brow.
"Ar aš miręs?"
More heat washes down his face, and he swallows before parting his lips. Gazes up with all the longing and regret he has tried to bury in the vault.
"Pasiimk mane su savimi."

Chapter End Notes

Translation in order of appearance:
"kheper" - Dung beetle / scarab
"Net, spasibo" - No, thank you
"Lozhis na krovat" - Lie on the bed
"Pochemu? Vy peredumali?" - Why? Have you changed your mind?
"U tebya tverdaya golova" - You have a hard head
"Moya slozhneye" - Mine is harder

“Spasibo za ideyu” - Thanks for the idea
“Mano aistringas berniukas” - My passionate boy
“Ar aš miręs?” - Am I dead?
“Pasiimk mane su savimi” - Take me with you

Redemption

Chapter Notes

> From Will's arrival on the basement floor, the chapter is intended to be read to the Illenium Remix of Disarm You by Kaskade, Ilsey: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUeXpU9jmaU

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With Chiyoh watching over Molly and Walter, Will gets into a taxi and asks to be taken to the Mori Art Museum. Sitting on the backseat, he turns his face to look out the window. Thinks about what Hannibal had said.

Would that make you love me? He hadn't answered the question. Didn't think he needed to. And even if he had answered, he does not believe it would have been enough to have stopped him leaving. *I'm sorry*. The man's apology had been alien to his ears. As did the claim of not wishing to force his hand. The guilt-inducing reminder of being without dependants, however, had struck a familiar chord in Will, having tasted the potency of Hannibal's crocodile tears in the past. Not counting their time spent at Mohamed's; twice the man had cried during their stay at the cursed mansion. The first time, Will had been too intoxicated to acknowledge. The second, he had never felt so uncomfortable in their time together following the fall. And if there's truth in what Chiyoh had intimated in the elevator, then there is no escaping the guilt of feeling as though he has driven Hannibal to the enemy in order to negotiate – what, precisely? The man doesn't appear to care whether Jack lives or dies. The thought of Hannibal trying to spare him the cruelty of their games is both ridiculous and insulting. Yet. If Chiyoh is right, then so is the notion of Hannibal being compromised by his feelings for him.

The problem remains that he can never be sure if the other is in earnest or simply trying to gauge a reaction. He still doesn't know, for instance, whether the doctor had knowingly taken the spiked drink at the club. It's a consequence of his actions that he needs to resolve, somehow – Hannibal unwilling to be straight with him. Retreating behind some invisible wall. Will had been telling himself their poor communication will get better over time somehow. When forgiveness might one day start looking within reach. But since their travels commenced, Hannibal has been leading them further and further into dangerous territory, and Will can only think of two reasons for this display of recklessness: that he is being tested to see if he is truly worthy, or that his mistake of wanting to destroy them both has put the doctor on a self-destructive bender, unbeknownst to the man himself. The latter terrifies him enough to make him want to believe even more vehemently in the former. To envisage Hannibal with all his tricks up his sleeve, unperturbed in the company of snakes and lions because he knows how to handle them, not because of a disinterest in his own self-preservation. *You want me, you don't want me. A little consistency would be nice, even for a booty call*.

Will is used to responding in anger because he is used to being antagonised by Hannibal. But now, the thought of the other suffering from depleted self-worth weighs heavy on him. With all that talk of damsels in distress, maybe deep down, that's what Hannibal has wanted. Only, he has done nothing to equip Will with the means of surviving these hostile situations, let alone contend with their enemies. If he doesn't go with the preferable idea that Hannibal has a plan behind all this madness, he is left with the disturbing notion of the man actively trying to get them both killed. Can imagine that face regarding him coolly as he asks if this isn't what Will had wanted. What will it take for him to prove to Hannibal that he regrets what he did? That he's sorry?

Face the exam, as Mohamed had called it. Will finds it hard to believe the man isn't working with the hostess, and yet he also wouldn't put it past the other to double-cross his associates. His threat, however, had rung hollow for Will. Nothing but hot air. Presuming the Egyptian's knowledge of the hostess's intentions, it seems pointless to make demands for what is already going to happen. Letting Molly and Walter go was her way of securing Jack's death. The man's fate is sealed, even if Will does abandon murder to take her up on her offer and attempts to board a plane with his wife and son. Attempt being the key word here, since Mohamed is able to pull strings in immigration.

Will bets the man simply wishes to remind him of how powerless he is just now, being the arrogant poser that he is. Make it sound like he has no choice but to become his lackey. Bringing Hannibal back to him. Of course, it has crossed his mind that Mohamed could be trying to drive him faster to his demise. But he also knows something of sadistic gratification, and would guess his remaining alive serves more purpose than his death as long as the other continues to derive pleasure from their torment. A perverse infatuation that can be taken advantage of, Hannibal had stated, and for all his current doubts, Will can at least imagine with crystal clarity the satisfaction of slaying the lion between them. Holds on to the thought of Hannibal being rejuvenated by Mohamed's death at their hands as he draws closer to his destination.

The towering skyscraper glows a cold white and blue against the dark night sky. The plaza itself is deserted. Walking towards the entrance to the museum, he takes the elevator up to a walkway. Makes his way to the double glass doors at the end. Finding them unlocked, he pushes his way through to stand in the silent lobby. The ticket desk is empty. Sensing a presence, he looks to the side to find the secretary from the restaurant standing with her hands clasped before her. An expectant smile on her doll-like face. As he paces towards her, she turns around and begins walking down the corridor ahead of her. The blank walls take them down one direction, then another. Following at a couple of paces behind, he stops when she does, and turns his eyes to the discreet looking elevator doors. He glances back over and sees a key sitting in her upturned hand. Eyes the cut metal for a moment before taking it and watching her thumb cross the small span of her palm before she holds up four fingers. Looking past the digits to her smile, Will can't help breaking the silence with a quiet scoff.
"Of course it would be," he utters. *The number pronounced like the word for death and thus considered unlucky in Japanese culture*, as Hannibal had explained. The smile deepens as though in understanding, and he watches her fumble in the small handbag tucked against her side.

The brown sheath she pulls out and displays elegantly with both hands like a bottle of wine is the length of the bag itself. Gazing upon leather, Will reaches up with a hand to clasp the pouch while closing the fingers of his other hand around the handle. Sliding the blade free, he stands there looking down at the cold steel of a hunting knife. She waits for him to take the sheath and clasps her hands before her again as he slides the blade back into place and takes a moment to examine and fix the holder at the small of his back. Keeping his expression mutual as she continues to smile at him, looking ready to offer assistance. He can't help wondering what's in it for people like her. Money, perhaps. Or, more likely, the sick satisfaction of having a role to play in a game orchestrated by those infinitely more powerful. He almost asks if she enjoys what she does, but knows he shouldn't waste his breath. *Of course she does*. The narrow doors to the hidden elevator slide open without a sound. Despite feeling like he's walking into his own coffin, he enters the confined space and watches the doors close on that unfaltering smile before turning his attention to the control panel. Slots the key into place beside the minus four. And presses the button.

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The elevator comes to a stop and the doors roll open to a vast space contained inside concrete walls, the bottoms of which are lit by strips of white LED. The only other light source is a huge glass tank sitting at the far end of the otherwise empty floor. At least twice the width and height of those

magicians are seen to use during their performances. Its bright blue glow serving as an eerie backdrop to the figure stood in front of it, watching him over the long stretch of concrete. Stepping out of the elevator, he walks towards the other with an echoing of footsteps.

Realises, upon nearing, that the man has been made part of an art installation against his will. Wearing a simple grey tee and lounge pants, Jack looks like he's been freshly hauled out of his bed. His feet are bare. His right ankle shackled by a length of metal chain to a steel anchor bolted to the ground. His right hand closed over the end of a long handle running down to the large metal head resting upon the floor. Will measures the chain with his eyes. Stops at a good distance away. Looks up.
"Hello, Jack," he greets without expression.
"Hello, Will," Jack returns the greeting evenly, his eyes lidded as he watches him. "I've seen you so many times in my dreams, it feels surreal to see you in person again," he says.
"It's a surreal situation."
"Are you ready?" Jack asks.
"For redemption?" Will asks back, unable to stop his brow furrowing.
"I think we're past that, don't you?" the other scoffs quietly.
Will glances down at the head of the sledgehammer.
"You wish to kill me, then," he says, looking up.
"Kill you before you kill me," says Jack lightly with a lofting of his brows. "I assume that's the game. A good old fashioned bear baiting," he drawls sardonically.
"It's not my design," says Will, trying not to sound remorseful.
"No," says Jack, his dark eyes narrowing. "It never was." Exhaling, he looks askance before adding, "I don't think I've ever stopped blaming myself for putting you out there."
"Now you wish to end it," says Will firmly before the other speaks more of the past. "Once and for all."
"I have to at least try."
He looks Will in the eye.
"Think I owe it to everybody."
Will holds that half drawn stare until Jack sighs and lowers his gaze.
"I tried, Will," he says tiredly.
Swallowing, he too looks down at the space between them.
"I know."

A sound from above makes them look up to see a blur of white falling from a trap door in the ceiling. It hits the water and begins immediately to struggle. Long legs clad in nothing but his shorts. His arms bound inside a straightjacket. Those hooded eyes watching them through the glass.
"I was wondering where he was," Jack murmurs before the harsh sound of a buzzer heralds the projection of a twenty-four hour timer on the concrete wall. The seconds climbing in glaring red.
"Free him before he passes out, Mr Graham, and he can be yours again," says her voice through hidden speakers. Loud and clear.
"I don't know what game this is," says Jack. "But it's starting to feel a lot like redemption."
"I thought we were past that," Will utters, unable to look away from Hannibal as he twists in the water. Facing the white hot terror threatening to petrify him, he tells himself the man's life is not really at risk. That he is far too important to these people.
"Since Bella left this world, there are just two wrongs I need to right in my life."
His life is not really at risk.
"We don't have to play their game," Will whispers, forgetting to mask his fear as he stands there staring at Hannibal's attempts to free himself from the straitjacket.
"No more games, Will."
The solemn sound of Jack's voice draws his eyes back to the other and the sledgehammer lifting in his hands.
"Let's keep it simple," Jack adds, and Will stares at the man standing in front of him. At the man

behind. Feels his heart threatening to burst through his chest as the adrenaline pumps through his veins. Logic displaced by panic. The sight of Hannibal struggling in the water too raw. Too intimate. *Keep it simple*. Game or no, he can't bear to watch a second longer. His hand is already reaching behind him, and Jack doesn't look surprised when he pulls free the hunting knife.
"I need that sledgehammer," he says lowly. Sees the sharpening of dark knuckles as Jack adjusts his grip on the handle and regards him without expression.
"Come and get it."

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Hannibal watches them fight through the glass. Watches Jack building momentum before taking a swing at Will who he knows doesn't try to cut his opponent's throat. Instead, he can see Will aiming to do enough damage to force Jack to drop the sledgehammer. But the man doesn't make it easy, fending Will back with the butt of the handle between swings. Dodging them, Will continues to circle, looking for an opening. When he finds one, he darts in to drive his knife into Jack's leg. It's a mistake, Hannibal knows, but dares not close his eyes. He watches Jack grab Will by the throat before head-butting him. It's enough to send Will staggering as the man prepares to swing at him again.

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Dodging the metal head, he runs round and leaps on Jack's back, catching him in a headlock. His knife held close to his throat.
"Drop it," he grunts.
"Alright."
He hears the tool hit the ground with a dull thunk before hands grab him. With a growl of effort, Jack ducks, throwing him over his head. Landing on his back on the hard floor, Will is partially winded, but scrambles back up with the knife in his hand just as the sledgehammer is lifted. This time, it catches him in the side, and he hears a crack. Stumbling from the hit, his hand darts out to brace against cold concrete. The metal head begins to rise. On his knees, Will drops the knife and holds up his hands.
"Wait!" he pants. "We'll do it!" Catching his breath, he stares up at the other. "We'll kill him together," he adds as the man pauses. "I forgive you, Jack," he rasps, face pinching with remorse. "Please." His eyes well with tears as he stares up at that impassive face. "I need help," he says waveringly as he clutches his side with a hand and bows his head. Starts to sob uncontrollably. "Please help me," he whimpers in a broken voice.

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Breathing out, Jack stares down through his lashes at the pitiful sight. Guilt makes the tool heavy in his hands, and he steps closer. Kneeling down on one knee, he lays a hand upon Will's trembling head. As he does, the other rears up without warning. Throws his skull into Jack's hard enough to make him shut his eyes. He hears the scrape of metal upon concrete. Hears the breathless *forgive me* and snaps his eyes open. Staring into wet, wretched blue, he drops the sledgehammer to catch the man's hand with both of his, stopping the knife as its very tip nicks his throat. With an angry cry, he thrusts his knee into Will's guts. And again when the other refuses to relinquish his hold. Wrenching the knife free from Will's grasp, he drives it into him. Sees those dark eyebrows knotting as lips press tightly together. Hooking an arm around the other's waist, he pulls the knife out. Stabs it back into Will who makes a spluttering noise.
"This is the only help," he pants. "For the both of you."

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Unable to pull himself free of Jack's arm, Will snaps at his bottom lip. Cuts and tugs hard enough with his teeth to sever the soft flesh until he feels the arm release him to grab his hair. Clasping the hand that wields the knife with both of his, he leans back with his teeth still latched onto Jack's lip. As the man growls, he feels the knife slowly pulling out of him. When the other finally jerks his head away, Will lifts his leg. Kicks at Jack to propel himself backwards and free himself of the blade before leaping forward again like a crazed animal. Knocking the man down onto his back, he straddles that body with enough force to double wind him before wrestling the knife out of his hand.
"I'm sorry, Jack," he pants, staring down into brown.
"You-"
With one swift movement, he opens his throat. Looks up at the tank. At the body that has stopped struggling. The bowed head as he hangs still and suspended in ghostly blue.

It's just a game.

Climbing off Jack, he staggers to the sledgehammer. Picks it up.

He means too much to them.

It hurts to breathe, but he pushes it aside to run to the tank. One hand pressed over his bleeding wounds.

You wanted me to kill Jack. I've done it.

The pain doubles when he lifts the tool with both hands. He grits his teeth to stifle a cry of pain.

Now help him.

He strikes the glass. The first crack appears.

Please.

Taking a shuddering breath, he raises the sledgehammer. Swings it again at the tank with a desperate growl.

Help him.

The first jets of water escape at high pressure, pushing against the fracture.

Because I…

Panting open mouthed, he lets out another pained shout as he builds momentum.

I don't know if I can.

As the metal head collides once more with the tank, the glass breaks and falls away, and with it falls Hannibal, washed into his waiting arms by the flood. Staggering back and trying not to slip on the water, he finds a clear spot and lays the man down upon his back before running to the knife. Snatching it, he hurries back to Hannibal. Cuts him free from the jacket and pushes his arms out the way.

I know you're watching.

On his knees, he clasps his hands upon that unmoving chest. Falls immediately into compressions.

What are you waiting for?

Leaning down, he pinches Hannibal's nose. Takes a deep, painful breath before pressing his mouth over the other's and blowing hard. Deafened by the frantic beating in his ears, he repeats his attempt to resuscitate. His shallow panting loud in the silence of the concrete box as he presses and presses on Hannibal's chest. Breathes air desperately into his mouth. Staring at those closed eyes, an involuntary whimper slips weakly from his throat as he continues to push. Each one eliciting another sharp stab of pain in his own chest until he cannot tell whether it is the rib or the rising grief.
"Help him, damnit!" he shouts brokenly, his voice echoing around them. Head darting down again, he breathes. And feels the next breath catching in his throat when Hannibal violently begins to cough, the water erupting from his spluttering lips. As hooded eyes begin to slip open, Will feels his face breaking into a smile. Makes a choked sound of relief from where he kneels, looming over the other.
"Hey…" he half whispers. *I got you*.
"Will…" says Hannibal weakly.
"Well done, Mr Graham," says her voice from the speakers. An abrupt and loud intrusion. "But I'm afraid it's no cigar."
Head lifting, he feels as though he is pleading with a merciless god and barks frustratedly:
"He's out!"
"Before you got to him, yes."

A movement makes him look towards a tall figure that has seemingly materialised in the corner of the floor. As the man begins to approach them with long, even strides, Will presses a hand to his wounds and picks up the knife.
"I did what you wanted," he shouts breathlessly, eyes falling half drawn as the adrenaline is compromised by exhaustion. His hand is damp. He doesn't need to look down to know he has lost a lot of blood. Neither the woman nor the man responds to his exclamation, and he puts himself between the latter and Hannibal. When he comes within range, Will slashes at him with the knife, but the surface wound he inflicts upon that arm raised to block is not enough to deter the other. A flurry of fists impacting on his face and wounded abdomen is all it takes for the man to land him on the floor. As he spits blood and pushes up on his arms, he watches the giant stooping to pick up the hunting knife before tucking it behind him.
"Stop," he grunts stubbornly as the other steps towards Hannibal. Lying there on his back, he doesn't appear able to move, and Will wonders if they had given him something before dropping him in the water. He starts to crawl to them on his hands and knees. Throws a hand onto that hard bicep when the man takes a knee. Ignoring Will's fist in his sleeve, he scoops Hannibal up into his arms. Seeing the handle of a gun at the small of his back, Will tries to grab it with a lunge. As though reading his intent, the man stands and he meets the hard end of a shoe. Kicked over onto his back, he pushes up tremblingly with a grunt to see Hannibal hanging over the other's shoulder. His hooded eyes lifting with effort to meet his.
"Should you survive, Mr Graham," her voice is suddenly with them again. "We welcome you to join us."
The man tosses something onto the ground before starting to walk off, carrying Hannibal with him into the shadows. Will doesn't break eye contact with those hooded eyes.
"Palauk manes," he says, lacking the breath to shout, yet hoping the other can hear him, or at least recognise the shape of the syllables. *I'll come for you*.

As they disappear into the dark, his eyes fall on the object left behind. Pulls himself up onto all fours to reach it. *You want to play?* He picks up the business card. *Alright*. Pushing it into his trouser pocket, he picks himself up onto his feet with effort. Staggers past Jack on his way over to the elevator. Doesn't look upon his face.

When the doors open, he steps in and backs against the wall as the dark space with its eerie LED is shut from view. Looking to the control panel, he sees the button for the next floor down is lit up. Tries to press the button for the surface, but gets no response. Sliding down into a sit, he stares tiredly at the closed doors. Thinks about his promise to Hannibal as he resists the urge of passing out and sinking into an oblivion without him.

Chapter End Notes

Translation:

“Palauk manes” – Wait for me

Mutual Friend

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The local underground organisation is not happy with the way the Hostess has been operating on their shores. They would like her removed, but they must respect the code of their circle. This means they cannot attack her directly. Instead, they must find an alternative way, and, learning of the games she is playing with those wanted by the authorities, they decide the best way to bring the Hostess down will be through her own vanity. They will be the oxygen to the fire that is Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham. A gust that blows then vanishes without leaving a trace.

The first fire they come across, however, is not a real fire. Rather, it is Chiyoh's attempt to create a distraction in order to move Molly and Walter out of the building without being spotted by Mohamed's men whom she knows are keeping watch nearby. Acting on behalf of his organisation and having watched Chiyoh from afar, Kenjiro knows which vehicle she plans to get into after setting off the hotel fire alarm. Waits in position behind a pillar in the empty basement until the blond fox – he prefers her natural hair – slips past the doors and steals her way towards him. Remaining out of sight, he lets her unlock and grab the handle of the driver's door before bringing the butt of his pistol down on the back of her skull, and catching her as she falls. With the fox put away safely in the trunk of the car, he climbs in behind the wheel. Drives up and out past the throng of people wrapped in hotel robes, searching for the mother and child, and spots them climbing into a black Audi with blacked out windows – at gunpoint, he presumes – before the door is pulled to.

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The elevator doors slide open to another set of doors sat waiting for him. Will stares through half drawn eyes at the two figures wearing facemasks and hooded disposable coveralls stepping down from the vehicle that has been backed up against the lift. He doesn't fight when they grab and hoist him up by the arms to half drag him into the interior of an ambulance. Barely has the energy to grunt as he's pushed down onto his back upon the stretcher, the change of position making his head spin as his breaths leave him in shallow bursts. His hands that are clutching over his abdominal wound are

pushed out of the way before cold metal opens his saturated shirt. He seems to feel several things all at once as he gazes at the ceiling past the two nondescript heads: his wound being packed, the sharp prick of a needle before it slides into his vein, the pinch of the mask they've attached to his face. At some point, he hears the doors slamming shut, followed by the opening and closing of another. And not long after that, the sound of the engine coming to life.

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The doctor has been so focused on saving the man's life, he has not noticed Ichiro drawing close enough to nudge the back of his skull with the end of the silencer.
"Tell your boss that he did not make it," he instructs in English before adding in their own language, "Don't try anything foolish."

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The business card that had been tossed upon the blood dappled floor and pocketed by Will contains the address of a traditional ryokan located hours outside of Tokyo in an obscure corner of the Japanese countryside. It is owned by the Hostess and currently closed to the public. Had Will Graham survived, it would have been the venue for part two of the games. Sat across the Hostess with a floor to ceiling view of a crystalized bower and vaporous spring to his left, Mohamed feigns an air of indifference as the phone is lowered to the spotless surface of the table.

"I was looking forward to round two," he says casually after draining his sake cup.
"There is more than one way to skin a cat," says the Hostess whilst reaching elegantly for the carafe. Holding up his cup, Mohamed lofts his brows to mirror the nonchalance of his companion despite feeling the disappointment of a feline having lost the mouse it had been tormenting for what seemed like a luxuriously long stretch of time.
"You have ideas for the boy and woman?" he says, lifting the cup to his lips and his gaze to her relaxed expression.
"I imagine the good doctor has wanted for the longest time to have the Grahams for dinner," she chuckles lowly, her syllables rolling smooth and rich as she sets down the carafe. Past the cup, he sees those red lips lifting subtly at the corners, and does the same before taking a sip.

++++

When Will next opens his eyes, he finds himself in a small white space, not entirely dissimilar to that of a doctor's consulting room. After the ambulance, his memory is unreliable. At some point, he could have found himself lying on his back in a similar room somewhere in the country, seeing a blurred face or two through the intermittence of consciousness. Or he could have imagined it. A sound draws his attention to the opening door – a brief glimpse of the same white and featureless space beyond does nothing to lessen the surrealism – and the figure stepping inside before the door is pulled closed again behind him. Whilst the man's face is in focus this time, Will cannot be sure if he is staring at something real or imagined: *mid-forties, Japanese*. The pain, however, is convincing enough. As though able to read his thoughts, the man lifts his right hand to show Will the syringe and small vial clasped against his palm.
"For the pain," he explains in accented English, and Will watches him move in his plain, pale blue shirt, to the bedside table. *Doctor, maybe.*
"Where am I?" Will asks, eyes on the nimble fingers making quick work of transferring the colourless contents of the vial into the syringe.
"Non-hostile territory," the man answers while injecting the drug into the bag hanging above Will's head. Physically and mentally drained, there is little he can do to protest against actions outside of his control. His paranoia, on the other hand, remains as tireless as always.

“Why should I believe you?” he utters.
“Because you are going to become our mutual friend, Mr Graham. You and Dr Lecter both.”
The crease deepens in his brow as he continues to stare upon the other’s mild countenance. He feels nothing but discomfort from hearing yet more strangers utter Hannibal’s name. And yet, with his bedridden state serving as a stark reminder of the lack of resources at his disposal – his communication with Chiyoh now put on hold – the weaker part of him that is stitched flesh and the remnants of internal bleeding can only hope this guy is not another Hostess or Mohamed.
“Friend is a strong word,” he murmurs cautiously with his eyes on the now empty syringe.
“You would rather enemy?”
When he doesn’t answer, dark eyes look calmly down at him.
“A man who has more friends than enemies is a fortunate one,” he continues to say.
“You said our,” says Will. *Enough of the proverbial. Give me some useful information.*
That serene countenance remains unchanged.
“We are interested in undermining and removing the Hostess and her influence from these shores,” says the man plainly.
“We.”
“Tokyo will turn a blind eye to yours and the doctor’s departure should you agree to assist us.”
“Departure,” Will continues to repeat the other’s words with a sceptical lofting of his brows. The man smiles politely.
“Having completed your objective, you may both rest assured that we will honour our part of the exchange.”
The scoff leaves Will’s lips before he can rein it in, but the man continues unperturbed.
“All transactions dealing in the currency of trust are taken very seriously here, Mr Graham.”
“With all respect, this just sounds like you want us to do your dirty work.”
“We prefer to call it a cleansing, if you will.”
“I assume you’re not going to tell me who you’re working for.”
“The good of the city.”
“You’re with the police?”
The polite smile deepens until tiny crinkles appear at the corners of the man’s eyes.
“We make the better deals.”
Knew it. More shady underground bullshit.
Exhaling, Will sinks back against the pillow, his eyes falling half closed as the pain begins to ease.
“Except it’s not really a deal when we don’t have a choice,” he utters sarcastically. “You’re just being disgustingly polite.”
“Would you rather I was disgustingly rude?”
“Why us.”
“Being disgustingly polite people,” answers the man lightly, “we wish to make it look as though the Hostess has brought about her own downfall.”
“For fucking with the wrong people,” says Will lowly and not entirely without relish.
The other’s turn to loft his brows.
“That word has many meanings in English.”
Will frowns.
“We didn’t,” he begins to say, then abandons the unpleasant thought to ask: “You know where they are?” A beat. “Where Hannibal is?”
“Yes.”
Do you know if he’s…
Swallowing, he averts his eyes to glare at the featureless wall.
“What do you know of a man named Mohamed,” he utters instead.
“The Establishment recognises Mr Mohamed as a man of great resources. It would be a shame if anything were to happen to him.”
Reading insincerity in the other’s inflection, Will feels a twitchy tug at the corner of his lips.

“I’m taking that as permission to kill,” he says darkly, regarding that composed expression from the corners of his eyes.
“So you agree to help us, Mr Graham.”
“If you give us more than just a shovel to pick up your shit.”
The faintest ripple stirs the dark depths of the man’s eyes.
“I’m afraid I’m not very familiar with this phrase,” he says coolly.
“All clubs have rules,” drawls Will. “And it sounds like you’re telling me this one has no official sanction for rule breakers. Bit risky, wouldn’t you say?”
“Well,” says the man with the faintest smile. “That is precisely what we are asking to you do, Mr Graham. Help the Hostess to break the rules.”
“And I’m asking how exactly you’ll be covering our asses,” says Will.
“Don’t worry, Mr Graham. I assure you they will be thoroughly covered.”
He scoffs, ignoring the hint of amusement in the other’s voice as his thoughts return to Hannibal. *They’re vouching for him. That’s got to be a good sign*. The drug creates enough space for relief to settle and stretch inside the crevices of his brain, and he closes his eyes to see his face again.

Palauk manes.

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To the Hostess, Will Graham, especially a deceased Will Graham, is not worth losing sleep over. As a result, she does not venture out of her room until the early afternoon. The boys are already in the kitchen when she arrives, and they lead the way to the walk-in cooler, pausing just outside to pin back the heavy PVC strips so she may enter unhindered.

Before her head had touched her pillow, she had received confirmation of the arrival of Will Graham’s body – put on ice, as she’d requested after the doctor had pronounced his death. Protected from the chill by her padded tanzen, the Hostess stands there, watching the two men remove the naked body from the iced bag and lay it, with the limbs unfurling from their foetal position, upon the surface of the stainless steel table. Her assistants move the body according to the travelling scrutiny of her gaze, and when they reach the head, she leans in close enough to share a kiss with the corpse. Tilts her face to examine the scars, and stares into glassy eyes when the lids are peeled open for her. She looks to the reference photos lying beside those dark curls. Has just started to read through the list detailing every mote of information that could be gathered on Will Graham’s body when the distant shuffle of slippers and a loud yawn tells them they have company.

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As he approaches the walk-in cooler, he can already see them messing with the body through the strip curtain. Cutting it open to check for whatever it is they are looking for. Somehow, it irks him to see them do this. Probably because he’s not the one desecrating Will Graham’s body. But more so because there’s nobody to torment with the act, rendering it utterly pointless. His only remaining option is to describe it all in minute detail to the good doctor when the drugs have finished scrambling his beautiful brains. Exhaling sharply with impatience, he is suddenly in the mood to strangle that dead neck with the man’s own intestines whilst shouting angrily in Arabic: *and just who gave Will Graham the right to end Mohamed’s fun?*

Pushing through PVC and cursing when some of his coffee sloshes out of the cup, he strolls his way over to the autopsy table. Standing beside the Hostess as she peruses her paperwork, he lifts the cup to his lips, pausing before taking a sip to say:
“I’m not sure about this sashimi lunch.”
“Perhaps you will reconsider when you see him presented as an array of beautiful small dishes,” says

the Hostess, her preoccupied tone drawing his attention from the blood slipping down the drain. He glimpses, from the corners of his eyes, the information on the paper in her hand. Glances at her lumbering manservant stepping back from the autopsy table and clasping his gloved hands before him like a doorman as he awaits further instruction. His shorter twin is standing across him on the other side of the body. Waiting. Opening his mouth, Mohamed is about to ask what it is they are looking for when his gaze falls on the dead man's penis.

"If you wait in your room, lunch will soon be brought to you," says the Hostess amiably, pretending, he presumes, to have lost interest in the document still clutched in her hand.
"Very well," he says equally as amiably, lofting his brows at the minions who are clearly waiting for him to depart before returning his attention to their boss. "But really. Don't try to sneak him into my lunch," he says, shooting a pointed look at – *what's the name of that tall Frankenstein in that show of freaks?* "I did not wish to spread the man when he was alive and I do not wish to spread him on my bread now." Turning with his coffee, he saunters out of the cooler, lips tugging at the corner as he takes a sip. Too amused to take offence at the now tepid beverage. *She knows it's not him, yet she can't put her finger on why, exactly. Unlike Mohamed with his eyes of a hawk*. He'll agree it's an impressive piece of forgery, but he'd much prefer the real phony – the wretched dog of a man hounding the godly beasts of blood. *After all*, he tells himself, *if Will Graham lives, so does Mohamed's fun*. He smirks.

Not bad, kheper.

Chapter End Notes

New Major Characters Reference:

Kenjiro and Ichiro

Translation:

"Palauk manes" – Wait for me
Kheper – scarab / dung beetle

You

Chapter Notes

> The presentation of Saint Sebastian is intended to be read to the cover of You by Kanon: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtMhHNQqxfk

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Suspecting something to be amiss despite failing to find answers from her inspection of the body, the Hostess gives orders for the doctor's residence to be searched. As soon as news returns of the empty premises and the absence of any leads that would have been made available had the security systems remained uncompromised, she promptly makes it known to her people that Mohamed is to be prevented from making contact with the outside. It is her firm belief that Will Graham's return to the fold, so to speak, has not been made on his own credit. Someone is helping him. Someone, she realises, with significant resources. But who would the man turn to? Who would help him, and for what gain? The next hedonist to take such open interest in the likes of Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham is none other than her supposed guest of honour. When she considers the self-satisfied Egyptian and his inherent self-interest, it is not difficult to imagine him playing them off one another purely for his own entertainment. For all his wealth and influence, the man is, after all, *a fickle shit*. And just like all the other depraved little boys wielding more power than sense in this world, he is nothing she cannot handle.

She carries lunch to Mohamed herself. Permitted to enter, she steps into the haze of tobacco smoke, through which she sees the man sitting at the low table in the middle of the room. Crossing the tatami, she waits for the silver hookah to be slid aside before setting down the tray and falling into seiza position upon the legless chair across from the other. Her eyes fall briefly on the portable charcoal burner sitting at the far end of the table before returning to the carafe between them.
"We had a guest almost set himself alight, once," she says whilst pouring the sake.
"Good job he didn't."
At the amused sound of his voice, she glances up into dark eyes watching her through the shifting veil.
"Or your palace of paper walls," the man continues to say before drawing hard on the mouthpiece and exhaling in a white flurry: "Poof." Unblinking against the smoke, she holds his playful, heavy-lidded

stare.
“It is peaceful here,” she says simply, setting down the carafe. “We would have been alerted by the first of his screams.”
“It must sound like an orgy at night when all the guests are fucking,” comes the low chuckle.
“It does,” she agrees with a lofting of her brows. “When there are enough guests.”
“I am enough, am I not, dear hostess. Quite the handful,” says the man with a lewd smirk as he leans back against the chair, the silver mouthpiece glinting whilst twiddled between his fingers as his arm rests languidly atop the knee pulled towards his chest. His relaxed posture invites her eyes to feast on his lack of undergarments beneath the slapdash approach to donning a traditional yukata.
“That you are,” she returns smoothly. “Choosing to play with fire despite the rules.”
Dark brows loft in understanding despite the feigned ignorance of his response:
“Should I be worried about getting burned?”
She glances again to the embers smouldering in the burner.
“Should the flame return,” she begins to say, her words slow and thoughtful, “and you catch fire as a result.” She meets his gaze. “Assistance may be delayed.”
The jutting of his bottom lip.
“And I thought you were the hostess with the mostess.”
“To guests who honour their host.”
“Have I not?”
She does not answer and there is a pause as they regard one another across the untouched plates.
Then, slowly lowering the mouthpiece, Mohamed sits up in his chair and leans forward to pick up the sake poured for him.
“You wish for me to leave?” he asks lightly.
“Rather, to enjoy your stay while you can,” she answers cordially with a smile, and sees the raising of one dark eyebrow.
“To my most gracious host,” says the man with undisguised irony as he lifts his cup at her before draining its contents.

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Molly Graham loves her husband. Many would likely ask why, given the man’s tenacious demons and tendency of getting his family in trouble. The answer is perhaps unexpectedly simple: relationships are not easy. She knew from the start that theirs would not be plain sailing, but neither does she consider herself to be a glutton for punishment. Her one fault, perhaps, in this world of warped humanity, is her patience for mankind. Waiting for that lost soul to finally make his way back to them. There is no rush where this kind of love is concerned. This is what Molly had believed and accepted in her relationship with Will Graham, unminding of his absence as long as she could make Wally understand why his father isn’t always there. That his troubling absences do not change the way he feels about his son. Nor can it take away from the warmth and contentment that has always been shared between mother and child. Indeed, she understands now that her attempt to introduce Will as a potential father figure into Wally’s life had been unnecessary; even if she’d brought a saint home that day, it wouldn’t change the bond between them. In fact, it had been the unspoken understanding between her and Wally – that this man needs them more than they need him. And as long as they were together, it did not matter if her husband and Wally’s father had to be away at times. They knew he would come back. And as a result, they did not expect to be going where *he* was.

Now, however, sitting on the low wooden stool with her arms wrapped around the legs pulled to her chest, Molly finds herself wishing she wasn’t Will Graham’s wife. Or, as she continues to sit there with her face in her lap, listening to the sound of someone choking on their own blood. The thrashing of the water grows less frantic, but she jumps nonetheless when her back is flecked with what she hopes is hot spring water – enough of it to penetrate the fabric of her yukata. Try as she might, she cannot prevent last night’s images crowding the inside of her eyelids, nor the returning sensation of

being sprayed with liquid heat. She had lain awake with the woman's scream ringing in her ears long after she'd cleaned her off the rocks. Her eyes scouring the immaculate paving and patches of moss surrounding the circular pool for anything that could be used against her captors. None was to be found. Today, they let her keep the stool. Confident she will not try to launch it at them again in a fit of desperation. *Where is he!* When fear for Wally's wellbeing had made her reckless with her own despite being made witness to the first of what would become a series of brutal murders committed against unwitting call girls. *Where is my son!*
"Mrs Graham."
At the sound of his muffled voice, she keeps her back to the pool.
"Don't miss a spot this time," he continues to say in accented English.
"I want to see my son," she says into her lap.
"You won't see anything if you don't look."
She says nothing.
"Look, Mrs Graham."
"Leave me alone."
She hears the sudden drag of water and looks over her shoulder to see him stepping over boulders blackened with blood. Between which the young woman's skull rests upside down. Her eyes wide and unblinking. Apart from the floating tresses of her long black hair, the rest of her body lies submerged in steaming red water. As the man approaches, Molly scrambles off the stool. Holds it up with its blunt and useless feet facing her adversary the same time she drags herself back upon the cold flags. Before she has used up enough chain to suffer the bite of its metal cuff, however, he grabs and wrests the stool from her hands. It clatters to the ground the same time she starts scrambling on all fours away from the hulking figure. Feels the metal cut into her ankle this time as the chain pulls taut abruptly, and she cries out in frustration and fear as she's grabbed round the waist. Growling through her teeth, she twists around and strikes with both hands at the hard wood of the demonic mask, cutting her knuckles open on its carved teeth, but doing nothing to stop the other throwing her over his shoulder. As he straightens and begins to walk, she looks up and swipes at the network of low-hanging branches, their bark damp from exposure to warm vapour. Catching hold of one, she clings onto it with both hands until his continuing strides, unaffected by the weak resistance forged between woman and nature, forces the branch to slip free of her grasp.
"No," Molly exhales a pale white flurry as she stares after the branch springing away. Then, without warning, the body supporting her weight drops – the splash telling her he has stepped into the pool, and barely has time to look down into the gaping mouth of the woman's throat before she is flung backwards through the air and down into the water.

Lying on her side beneath a low ceiling without a lamp, she stares through her lashes at the white light filtering faintly through the parchment squares of the screen in front of her. In the previous cell, there had been an identical paper screen that she'd spent most of the night trying to tear through until she realised the lattice was constructed out of solid metal. Having shoved her arm through one of the paper windows and flailed it around in search of something – anything – to get her out, she'd stopped when her fingers crashed against the distorted contours of a mask. Before she could pull her arm back through the torn parchment, her wrist had been caught, and by it, was promptly jerked towards her captor hard enough to slam her into the bars. Ignoring the pain of a rattled skull, she'd clung to the lattice, shouting for them to give her her son. Her cries had been ignored and after what seemed like hours, she gave in to exhaustion and drifted off against the cold metal.
"Your food is getting cold," says the voice from the other side of the screen. It belongs to the masked man who threw her into the pool and held her under until she was close to drowning. He'd allowed her to break for air before pushing her back under. In the struggle, she'd swallowed liquid heat tasting of iron. Can still taste it now. The blood of the call girl.
"You want to see your son," the voice continues to murmur, and Molly immediately pushes up before lunging at the wall.
"Please!" she growls frustratedly, fingertips gouging parchment as she grips the lattice.

“The tray.”
She looks back over her shoulder at the food left in front of the sliding door that she’d heard rather than seen. She’d tried, when it’d first opened, to stop it from closing, but to no avail. In the scrabble of trying to pry the door open, she’d knocked aside with her knees and feet, the carefully placed small plates now lying in a scattered mess upon the tatami.

Turning from the screen, she drags herself over to the overturned crockery. Picks up a sliver of something cold in the dim and pushes it into her mouth.
“Good girl,” says the voice coaxingly, and Molly clutches porcelain with the intention of launching it through the lattice. *No. The wall. So it smashes into pieces*. *Then find one sharp enough*. She swallows the morsel, her eyes on the faint gleam of the polished square dish beneath her fingers.
“Can you find more?” the man continues to purr, so she picks up another fragment. Puts it in her mouth and forces herself to chew. She keeps eating what she can recover from the disarray of dishes until he pipes up once more in his accented English: “Last one.” It takes her a while to find it. When she does, she puts it in her mouth with the relief of knowing it’s the final piece.
“Well done, Mrs Graham.”
“Fuck you,” she whispers hoarsely with her eyes closed.
“Now tell me.”
The smallest pause.
“How does he taste?”

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Something disturbs the relative silence. A wailing in the far distance. Is it real? Or a projection from the innermost crypt?

Walking down the dimly lit hallway, he hears the hushed sound of a sliding door up ahead and sees Antonios stepping out in an oni mask. He recognises the Russian from his height; there is no one quite as tall on this side of the premises. The man begins to travel towards him, so he too continues on his way, pausing only when the other does – that white face turning slowly to regard him. Standing side by side in the middle of the narrow hallway, they say nothing as he lifts his eyes to the ones watching down at him through the holes of the mask’s pupils. When nothing happens, he turns his gaze away and resumes walking in the opposite direction where he becomes aware of the sound of weeping. He follows it to the door of the room Antonios had occupied and turns his face to look back down the hallway, only to find it empty once more. Putting his hand on the screen, he slowly begins to slide the door open.

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Whatever they injected her with, she can feel it closing in. Denying her the right to mourn. Just kill me, she’d screamed when they held her down in her own mess of bile and tears. *Kill me so I can be with him*.
“Molly.”
A voice. Quiet. Close. The first to address her by her name since coming to this hell, but not one she recognises. *Are you real?*
“Yes?” she whispers hoarsely.
“Why are you crying?” the voice asks.
Because…
“They killed him.”
I failed him.
Her eyes water again.
“My boy-”

I failed to protect him.
The drug tightens its grip, crushing her slowly within its palm, and she chokes on the rest of the words. Lacks the energy to curl in on herself as she once more fills the confined space of the cell with her keening – exhaustion reducing her grief to little more than broken sobbing. It is only when her throat grows too frayed to continue does the voice remind her she's not alone.
"Walter's not dead."
Staring at the door, it takes a moment to process what she has heard.
Are you real?
"They're just playing," says the voice.
Face twisting with effort, she snatches at the retreating dregs of her consciousness. Catches just enough to roll herself over.
"Playing," she murmurs tiredly, eyes barely open as she gazes upon the lattice.
There's no one there…
"Yes."
Stop it.
"How do you know…"
"I've seen him."
"Walter?"
"Yes."
A weak noise escapes her throat as she squeezes shut her eyes.
"Don't lie to me," she whispers.
Stop it.
"I'm not."
"Oh god-"
You're not real.
"He's alive."
Are you?
"Please, I…"
"Yes, Molly."
Please be real.
"Need your help."
No response.
Please let Wally be okay.
"Please. He's just a boy-"
"Molly."
She waits, reluctant to reopen her eyes.
"Do you know who I am."
You're not just a voice in my head.
"Should I…?"
"I am the reason the Dragon came after you."
The words are familiar, dispersing the haze enough for the sound of baseball being played on the hospital television to trickle through. His voice when he says *I'm sorry*.
Her eyes open.
You.
"Where is Will?" she rasps lowly.

++++

The first night his mind had started to clear from the fog of his narcotics fuelled stupor, he'd opened his eyes to find the other lying on his side across from him. Head in hand. An amused smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.
"Hello sleeping beauty," he'd murmured. Yukata open at the chest. Watching the other's garment, it

was then that he'd realised he himself was lying naked upon the tatami. He'd clenched internally, looking for signs of forced entry. Aware of the possibility for the victim to be made none the wiser even whilst knowing that to commit the act in stealth is to remove the element of entertainment for a man like Mohamed.
"Did you gather the first fruits of love?" he'd murmured back.
"You mean did I put my penis in your sleeping body?" the other had chuckled amusedly before picking himself up. "Come. Your banquet awaits."
Sitting up, he'd watched Mohamed move to a suit bag hung up against the lattice. The zip as it'd made its way down, revealing a formal *montsuki haori hakama*. Regarding the white crests of the black half coat, he'd asked:
"Am I getting married?"
And was answered with glinting eyes and smirking lips.
"I'm afraid the groom got cold feet."

++++

[Flashback]

The cold air is sharp when it enters the body. Snow lightens what would otherwise be a dark retreat wrapped in shadows cast upon them by a thousand leafless arms. No chirping of insects or birds. He follows a step behind Mohamed as the Egyptian saunters his way down the raised platform of the *engawa* towards a large connecting building, his sandalled feet thudding softly upon lacquered wood. In silence, Hannibal travels the length of the veranda after him, conscious of the weight and restriction of his garments. Exposed to the elements, he is tempted at every passing second to stray. Instead, he uses the fan held closed in his right hand – its hard edge digging into his palm and reminding him of the dignity that comes with composure.

As he nears the towering structure, he likens its appearance to that of an ancient temple, and upon their approach, the huge wooden doors begin slowly to swing open.

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0:00-0:22

He waits for the doctor to catch up. Listens for the sound of his feet to come to a stop beside him at the entrance. A smile lifting his lips as he glances askance to see those hooded eyes looking down the great hall. At the lone sculpture standing in the vast emptiness. Her interpretation of another Bernini. The hopeless *Saint Sebastian*.

0:23-1:06

The Hostess is saying something about a reminder of the early period of Bernini's art. She implies Will is merely the beginning of Hannibal as an artist. One who will go on to create far superior works. *I felt it rather fitting*. He hears this much, though her voice travels to him through water as he feels the ground beneath him disappearing. *Having survived the arrows, he returned to lecture those who deemed him dead. Only to be killed properly the second time*. The room begins to spin and he must close his eyes, if only for a brief moment, lest they sense his distress. He is aware of champagne being passed around. More talking. But all he hears is the sound of Will struggling in the water the night they fell.

Hannibal!

Here.

Hannibal!

I'm here.

I can't see you!

I'm here.

Hannibal!

1:07-1:17

They move on, and he is left standing before Will on his own. Staring, and seeing, for the first time, what he has done.

1:18-1:39

Using his teeth, he drags the morsel off the bamboo skewer. Makes a sound of pleasure as he chews and lofts his brows at the chef standing at his work station in front of them with his head down and focus on preparing. Glancing back over his shoulder, he sees the doctor breaking from his frozen stance to look towards them. *You smell it, don't you?*
"I say, it's almost as good as Hussain's kebabs!" he cries jovially before looking back at the chef. "No offence, my friend."

1:40-2:01

It is no longer possible to ignore the smell of charcoal and flesh. Turning from one horror to the next, he moves as though sleep walking towards Mohamed and the Hostess. Sitting at a pop up yakitori bar. There are three barstools. The one remains unoccupied, flanked on both sides by the enemy. Breathing in, the delicious aroma makes him salivate even whilst despair sits heavy in the pit of his stomach. When he reaches the bar and lowers himself onto the barstool, the chef places a small plate before him. He doesn't need to hear the stoic utterance of *hato* to know what meat this is.

2:02-2:23

He is aware of staring too long at the loaded skewer. Enough for the Hostess to suggest chef displays the organ from which the meat originates should it help convince their honoured guest to share in the culinary experience. He picks up the skewer before the chef can oblige. Brings it to his lips and eats the first piece, recalling the first time Will forced himself into his mouth. The weight of his blood swollen member between his teeth. His heart beating in his jaws.

2:24-2:46

Their chatter is no more than a hum as he works his way through small plates and bottles of sake. A part of him having considered the merits of biding time as opposed to lashing out with skewers and broken glass in front of a man wielding a knife. *Or a firearm*. Antonios is never far. Standing there with his hands clasped before him. Waiting to get to Hannibal before he gets to his boss. Or himself. Though it's unlikely they will let him die. Standing suddenly, he pushes from the bar and travels back the way he came. Halfway, he stumbles and catches himself on the plinth before vomiting violently at Will's feet.

2:47-3:10

It is with an unexpected sting of embarrassment that Mohamed watches the good doctor begin to pick up the pieces of half-digested meat and push them back into his mouth. As much as he enjoys witnessing the suffering of others, he does not find it fun to watch a great mind debase itself by mirroring the weakness of lesser intellect. *We scramble the brains of idiots, my friend. Not the other way round*. Thankfully, her man Lurch soon puts a stop to this, though Mohamed can't decide whether it's taking more of the doctor's dignity, being pulled up onto his feet and dragged out of the hall.

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He finds the doctor later in his room. Facing him with his back as he lies there on his side upon the tatami. Stripped down to his white under-kimono. As he slides the door shut behind him, he hears the other murmur thickly:
"Have you come to gather the first fruits of love?"
Where's the fun in that, Mohamed muses to himself as he arches a brow at the back of the other's head.
"I hate to say it my friend," he exhales, uncaring of being listened to, should there be mics hidden within the confined space. He wouldn't put it past her. "But it really is no fun without that dog hounding after you," he scoffs, planting his knees on the tatami beside the still figure and grabbing the man's upper arm to push him over onto his stomach before moving on top. "Dragging those big balls of his," he continues to murmur as he runs his hands up the thin material wrapped around the other's sides until, fisting the back of that white collar, he tugs it down to bury his face against warm skin. Makes a muffled sound of satisfaction as he kisses his way hungrily to the fine hairs at the nape; the loud smacking of lips and the rasp of his beard distracting potential listeners from the tiny hiss behind the doctor's ear as he tugs open the man's kimono with a loud rustling of silk: *saint's too small*. Grabs that chest with both hands whilst fastening his teeth on his earlobe and pulling hard. The sound of the door sliding open makes him pause and glance over to see that tall bastard again.
"Yes?" he mumbles around the doctor's earlobe.
"Guests are not permitted to rape on the premises," says the man tonelessly.
Releasing the delicate flesh, Mohamed lofts his brows at the dumb Russian.
"You put your guests in cuffs and expect them *not* to get raped?"
"Yes."
"How do I know you weren't coming here to rape him yourself?"
"Please vacate the room."

++++

I hate to say it my friend, but it really is no fun without that dog hounding after you. Dragging those big balls of his.

Alone again, he opens his eyes.

Saint's too small.

Closes them as, paralysed by hope, he remains lying on the numb side of his body. Able to breathe again yet unable to move as relief washes away the anguish, and he's left to sob violently in silence.

Chapter End Notes

You

0:00-0:22

Where are you now?
What are you doing?
Are you on the other end of this sky?

0:23-1:06

For the first time, I realised
I've lost the things that filled my heart.
How much you supported me
How much you made me smile.

The burden of losing them
Was too much for me to bear.
Though I struggled so desperately
To reach out and take them back.

1:07-1:17

I thought I could reach them
But instead they slipped through my fingers like the wind.

1:18-1:39

Constricted by loneliness and despair
It felt like my heart would break.
But memories of your smiling face
Encourages me to go on.

2:02-2:23

Let's return to those days once more.
I know it will be alright this time.

Let us laugh together again
With me by your side.

2:24-2:46

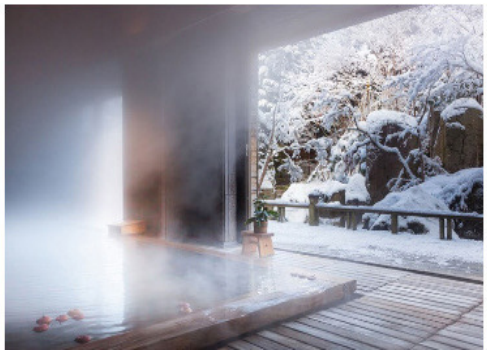
Where are you now?
What are you doing?
Are you on the other end of this sky?
Are you smiling at me like you always have?
Now, that is all I can wish for.

Sons and Daughters

Chapter Notes

Chapter intended to be read to the following tracks at specific moments:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Havox-gz4GQ
03:26 - 07:11 Tsushima
20:03 - 23:47 Shinigami

See the end of the chapter for more notes



It is with humiliation that Hannibal allows himself to be helped up by the two women in kimonos and led into the bathroom. He doesn't protest when they strip him methodically of the garment already hanging untidily off his frame after Mohamed's visit the night before. Helped into the readymade bath, he sits there in the confined space in silence, grateful his assistants have not taken to helping him wash. It's likely they are waiting for him just beyond the open doorway, however. He can't remain in the bath, staring listlessly through the snaking tendrils of steam. Then, as the fogged corridors of his mind palace begin to clear, a conversation returns to him in the quiet of the room. Just before they'd set out for the restaurant. Before he'd started to lose faith in himself upon discovering Jack and Will's family held like trump cards in the enemy's hand. Will had been commenting on the fit of his trousers. Had suggested Hannibal had lost weight. At the memory of his voice, he moves a hand over his hip. Supposes he could eat more, especially after last night's disaster that'd left his full stomach painfully hollow.

Hand remaining on his side, he thinks about what Mohamed had said both before and after he had been interrupted by Antonios. The first words that had almost been lost to the noise of his molestation – deliberate, he considers upon retrospect, to mask the hissed syllables. *Saint's too small*. Typical of the other, of course, to be so crude. And in his admittedly distracted state, it had taken a touch longer than usual to process what the Egyptian was trying to tell him. As though he had wanted to make sure Hannibal understood, the chuckle had come just before the man finally stepped out: *Thought I'd give the doctor some loving now that he's not here to do it.* He isn't entirely sure why he is given this information, if his interpretation is correct. *The body isn't him. He's not on the premises*. Suspects it has a lot to do with Mohamed entertaining, in some form or another, his own sadistic and antagonistic pursuits – be it an obsession with preying on one's superiors that somehow makes toying with weakness less entertaining, or an attempt to undermine the games being played by their hostess – and less to spare Hannibal the grief he had unfortunately allowed everyone to witness. A sigh and the closing of his eyes. *Koks apgailėtinas vaizdas.*

If he'd known it likely wasn't Will's flesh – that the man wasn't in fact deceased – he could have actually enjoyed himself with all that quality sake and excellent yakitori, whosever meat was used. Instead, he'd thoroughly embarrassed himself in front of the enemy. The thought of which now makes him slip slowly beneath the surface of the water. He soon feels hands grabbing him by the biceps, however, denying him the attempt to hide from his own shame as they drag him up the back of the bath. A soft palm cups his cheek, and he lifts his gaze past the running tresses plastered over his eyes to the impassive stare of the Hostess's minion.

"Shinpaishinaide," he says quietly. "Watashi wa jisatsu shimasen."

"Good," comes the stoic reply, her accent different to that of the city dwellers. A local, perhaps, of the area. "For it is too beautiful a morning to die, most honoured guest."

He stands there as they dry and dress him in a kimono and haori, but without the formality of the hakama. Every touch of the women's hands is purposeful and precise, as though they are folding him into a perfect origami. When finished with the garments, they go to the extent of pulling tabi socks onto his feet and combing his hair for him, somehow knowing just how he likes to wear it. All this careful attention ought to help restore some of his dignity, but he knows it is merely another illusion, and that he won't truly be able to regain his self-respect until he has left the premises. Or killed the host.

"Please take a seat in the hiroen," says one of the women when both have stood back with their hands clasped before them, satisfied with their work. "Breakfast will be served to you there." They bow and Hannibal returns the formality before watching them vacate the room. Slowly, he walks across the tatami, passing the low table and legless chairs on his way to the veranda at the far end. Past the lattice screens which have been pulled apart, the glass doors stand closed to keep out the chill of the outdoors lying in pristine white on the other side. *You believe him?* At the sound of her voice, he looks down at the chair which she now occupies. Watching him with lofted brows. It's a valid question. Believing the Egyptian requires trust. *He could be lying*. But Hannibal trusts the man to remain self-serving. *I believe him*, he says with a smile, though she continues to regard him with mild scepticism. *It's that, or face the alternative*, she says quietly before turning her face to the pane, the morning light exposing the true depth of the old gash above the neat collars of her kimono. Her skin as pale as the landscape beyond. *We've left you behind*.

His smile fades slightly as he regards her cold profile. A faint pang from the night before and the night he last held her making him stir and look away to stare through the glass himself. *No*. He believes in the Egyptian who is also the enemy of his enemy. Or rather, he believes in the *jinn* that is Mohamed. Just as he believes in all of Will's demons. *I'm afraid you'll have to wait a little longer, Abigail.* After all, he'd waited three years, once. Anything could've happened to the man whilst he'd been behind glass. Car crash. Slipped off a ladder and cracked his head open on a rock outside his shed. His dogs licking at the pooling blood. He'd tortured himself many a night throughout those years. Lying on his back and growing increasingly angry at the thought of the other being stolen from him in the most mediocre of ways. He'd suffered the most vivid nightmares of Alana coming through the doors to give him the news that Will is no longer with them on account of a DIY gone wrong. At least this way, even if he is to blame for Will's failure and death at the enemy's hand, his ghost will haunt him as opposed to his little man shed back home.

[*Tsushima 03:26-07:11*]

The sound of a sliding door interrupts his bitter reflection on domesticated life and makes him look over his shoulder to see her entering the room with Antonios.

“Good morning,” comes the greeting, the rich alto of her voice rolling off the tongue as they walk towards him. The grey of her eyes glint like whetstones as she steps into the bright light reaching past the veranda. Her smile is as generous as it had been when she was standing before Will’s doppelganger in the great hall the night before and, suppressing the sudden urge to do her harm, he turns bodily to face her beautifully attired person. The golden waves of her hair in contrast to the deep black of her kimono as well as the black shirt and trouser combo of the man standing beside her. Complete with visible black firearm.

“Good morning,” he replies, eyes lifting from the white cranes falling short of scaling the height of her long legs hidden beneath exquisite silk – their wingspans trapped within the width of her low hanging sleeves.

“Please sit,” she says, gesturing to the chairs with an upturned hand, and Hannibal slowly lowers himself into one before watching her do the same across the table. Conscious, all the while, of Antonios moving to stand behind him. As though on cue, the door slides open in the main room and without breaking eye contact with the hostess, he sees a small figure travelling towards them in his peripheral vision, followed closely by a second. Recognises them as the women from before as they approach the table and begin immediately to transfer an assortment of small plates across from their trays. She continues to smile at him as the surface of the table grows crowded, and looks neither at the women who dismiss themselves with a bow, nor the porcelain cup and saucer that she picks up and holds elegantly between her hands whilst leaning back in her chair. The smell of quality coffee is enticing.

“Do help yourself,” she says as though having read his mind, and he feels her gaze remaining on him as he looks down at the dark contents of his cup. Picking it up together with its saucer, he mirrors her posture and takes a small sip.

“You look good in a kimono,” she says.

“Thank you,” he replies courteously after swallowing. “You look divine.”

She hums amusedly, the rim of her cup pausing on its way to her lips.

“The furisode is commonly worn by young Japanese women when they come of age.” A lofting of her brows before she adds: “I am twice that age.”

He sips his coffee before commenting politely:

“We do what makes us happy.”

“Indeed.”

A deliberate pause, followed by a tilting of that golden head.

“And yet you didn’t seem so happy last night.”

Her voice, whilst light, probes knowingly. He glances aside.

“I was…”

His turn, now, to pause for effect. Eyes lowering.

“Disappointed?” she finishes for him.

He is silent as he continues to stare at the small plates.

“In him as opposed to my composition,” she adds loftily.

“It was a good composition,” he admits in a quiet voice.

“We are in agreement, then,” she states assuredly. “Will Graham was merely your beginning.”

Turning his face to the side, he closes his eyes.

Her voice slips down in pitch and volume before the eventual murmur:

“He made you lose faith in yourself.”

And he wills a tear to fall as he swallows before parting his lips and letting them hang mute. Hears the rustle of silk and sits still as he senses her drawing near. He lets her take his chin in one hand and smear the moisture from his eye with the thumb of another.

“Come now,” she coos soothingly, and he opens his eyes slowly to look up and see her closing her lips over the pad of her thumb. Watching him through her lashes, she sucks it clean before leaning down. Her face close to his.
“Let’s replenish those electrolytes.”

The grip on his chin tightens and he holds her gaze as she reaches for the small plates. Brings a piece to his lips which part obediently and remain open for her fingertips. With a subtle pout of pleasure, she withdraws the latter so he may chew, sucking them clean again before murmuring in velvet syllables:

“That’s a good doctor.”

She gives him a hard squeeze with her fingers before releasing his face.

“Now eat up,” she says cordially whilst straightening, and Hannibal swallows the morsel before slowly leaning forward. Setting down the cup and saucer, he picks up the chopsticks. Eyes on the array of small dishes as he slides them free of the sleeve.

“That was delicious,” he says humbly. “May I see the menu?” He glances up with eyes still a little damp at the corners. Facing him once more as she lowers herself back into her chair, the smile on those red lips deepen.

“Would knowing alter the pleasure?” she asks curiously.

A calculated beat before he answers:

“I don’t believe so?”

She watches him amusedly whilst unsheathing her chopsticks.

“Truly?”

Looking up again at the playful drop in octave, he holds her gaze.

“Well,” she continues to murmur, breaking eye contact so she may choose the next piece. Having made her selection, she pins her sleeve out of the way before leaning forward to present it to him

between the points of her chopsticks. “I assume the inclination must have crossed your mind at some point.” He receives the offering with the compliance of a quietly cowed guest. Closes his mouth and chews as she regards him shrewdly whilst adding: “To have the Grahams for dinner.”

Licking his lips delicately after swallowing, he looks down at the tiny portions presented beautifully on crackle glaze ceramic.

“Am I having them for breakfast?” he asks with a small tilt to his head.

“Do you want to?”

He watches that charming smile as he pretends to consider.

“Will it be as fresh as a sushi breakfast at Tsukiji?”

“Fresher,” she promises with a twitch at the corner of her lips.

They’re alive. Most likely on the premises.

“Tonight?” he says with a touch of hopefulness, watching her with an expression that combines the impassive with the imploring. Just enough to stir the predatory ego. “If you may allow me to build my appetite,” he adds, gazing into grey obscured by fair lashes as the porcelain rim is raised to her lips.

“But of course,” she says smilingly.

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After breakfast, he is allowed to return to his own company and rest – her suggestion merely testifying to his inability to mask the weariness of a poor night’s sleep. The nap he falls into is black and deep, a stillness most welcome after the sickening turbulence of emotions suffered as of late. It is with regret that he finds himself waking not long after to the sound of the door sliding open and the sight of her entering with Antonios once more in tow like a towering shadow. Strolling across the tatami to seat herself at the low table, she tells him she will wait as he freshens up, and leans back leisurely to watch him climb out of the western style bed in only his shorts.

Having declined the offer of Antonios’s assistance and dressed himself under her observation – admittedly without the same level of finesse as the women from earlier – he is led to a room with a large low table laid out for the practice of calligraphy. In place of windows, beautiful scrolls featuring strong, sweeping black characters line the walls together with traditional landscapes. With Antonios standing over him, he takes a seat at the table as instructed and looks over the tools as they are explained, his eyes settling at last upon the inkstone. Large and deep, it sits full to the brim with a dark substance, the scent of which is unmistakable.

“There’s plenty more when you run out,” she says, watching down at him. “We froze every last drop.” That smile again. “Feel free to peruse the volumes if your poetry is a little rusty.” His eyes move to the books piled beside the empty sheet of paper sitting central on the patterned blotter. He licks and parts his lips before reciting the well-known haiku:

“First snow falling on the half-finished bridge.”

His gaze moves up to seek approval, and she hums in condescendence at the predictability of his choice.

“Spring rain leaking through the roof,” she quotes lowly. “Dripping from the wasp’s nest.” Her lashes form a veil, and he holds her scrutinising gaze as he makes a show of recollecting. After the deliberate pause, he says in a voice that alludes to intimacy with its hushed syllables:

“A bee staggers out of the peony.”

“Lucky bee,” she says.

“Lucky peony,” he says in return, winning another hum and glance from the corners for her feline eyes as she shows him her profile.

“Indeed,” she murmurs whilst turning her back, the presence of Antonios at his elbow preventing him from using the table as a step up and the inkstone a tool with which to cave in her skull.

Left alone again, he glances up to the corners of the room. Understands his movements to be monitored and that people are likely waiting on the other side of the door should he break an unspoken rule. Carefully holding back his sleeve, he picks up the calligraphy brush. Dips the tip of it into the dark well of the inkstone and imagines he is reproducing a famous poem for Will. *Cold night: the wild duck, sick, falls from the sky*. He can’t recall the rest of the haiku, nor the shape of the characters, and sets the brush down before picking up the volume sitting atop the pile next to him. Opening it, he reads the contents and sifts through the pages until he finds it: *Cold night: the wild duck, sick, falls from the sky and sleeps awhile*.

“Sleep is a metaphor for death,” he hears her say, but doesn’t look up from the crisp page.

“If it is, then maybe I’m dead,” he says simply.

“Maybe that’s why you’re seeing more of me.”

“Maybe I miss your company.”

“But not enough.”

“No?”

“Or you’d try harder to kill yourself.”

His eyes leave the tidy black characters and find her over the top of the book, dipping her finger into the inkstone and colouring in the empty smile he gave her.

“He wouldn’t forgive me if I did,” he says.

“Like that’s even a thing between you,” she scoffs, blue eyes rolling. “Do either of you even know what it means anymore?” she adds with the scorn of a long-suffering daughter to idiotic parents. He turns the page. Reads aloud:

“Bush warbler: shits on the rice cakes on the porch rail.”

“I’m sorry. Am I shitting on your creativity?”

“Just my feelings.”

A soft groan as her brow drops exasperatedly to her folded arms upon the table.

“Please stop.”

The words are stifled by the sleeves of her kimono as Hannibal considers reaching across to tap the back of her head with the weighty hardcover. Instead, he returns his attention to the page. Until he hears it again. Quieter. As though from a distance. And he looks over, expecting Abigail to have gone. But her head is up as she, too, listens closely. Accompanied by the thud of feet – two sets creating an irregular rhythm – a young voice reaches them through wood and parchment:

“Stop! Where are you taking me?”

The door slides open and one of the women Hannibal recognises from that morning hurries in, half dragging a child across the tatami.
“Let go!” he cries, and she does, releasing him so he drops onto the floor in front of the table. Eyes wet, his haori hanging off one shoulder, the boy looks over at him. His stare transporting Hannibal back to the other side of the cold room door. When he’d moved before the other had seen him.

“Use the books,” the woman hisses, drawing those scared eyes back to her. “Make something beautiful. Earn her respect. Maybe she will spare you then.”

“But-”

“Don’t come out until you’ve finished.”

She turns and makes her leave despite Walter’s cries for her to *wait, please*! When the door slides shut after her, Hannibal watches the boy struggle to crawl to it with his bound wrists and ankles. The plastic ties cutting red bracelets into his pale skin.

“Maybe you should stay,” he says after a moment, and Walter stops, his shoulders slumping and making the haori slip further down his small frame. Eyes taking in the kimono and rumpled hakama, Hannibal presumes the women gave him their assistance, too, whether or not the boy wanted it. Supposes their hostess deems it appropriate to dress up dinner, and considers the child lucky for having avoided the less dignified treatment one would have experienced at a certain Muskrat Farm.

“I can’t.”

At the defeated sound of his voice, Hannibal’s gaze moves up to Walter’s profile. That troubled frown reminding him of Will despite the lack of any biological ties. The child’s ignorance to Hannibal’s influence on his young life also transports him back to the very beginning with Will sitting on his desk, apologising for dragging him into his world. No doubt the man has found himself apologising years later for dragging his wife and step-son into theirs – will likely still be apologising if they all make it out of here alive. His eyes narrow faintly as though he has been slapped by the ever growing irony. That exasperated voice in his ears: *so we’re just going to spend the remainder of our lives living in the past?*

“Who are you?”

Even his questions remind him of Will. *I’d put you back behind glass if I could have the old doc back.* But when he meets the boy’s eyes, they do not regard him with the same scorn. Oblivious, as he is, to the man before and after he became involved with his stepfather. He could strike fear into the child’s heart, though it would bring him no pleasure, now, to play the villain. Better to ask for all the horridly humdrum details of a life without him, and relish in the pain that is the lifeblood of their relationship.

“A guest,” he finally answers. “Like you.”

“You’re not tied up,” says Walter.

“I have been.”

“Will you help?”

That pleading frown.

“With your calligraphy?” he says innocently. “I believe she said-”

“I don’t care what she said.”

Eyes lidding, Hannibal watches the bound hands lifting to wipe away a tear.

“Maybe so,” he begins calmly to say. “But it is my understanding that she is trying to help you. And that they know you’re here when you’re not supposed to be.” A brief pause to let the suggestion of danger emanate. “Why not make the most of it?”

Another swipe at his damp cheek. A sniffle.

“They took my mom,” says Walter quietly, his eyes gazing at nothing in particular. “I don’t know where. I don’t even know if she’s still alive. I should be afraid, like you. But I’m just angry.”

Hannibal tilts his head.

“Like me?” he echoes curiously.

“You’re playing along with their games,” states Walter, his glistening eyes watching him from the corners. “Who have you lost?”

The question is unexpected. As is the half whisper leaving his lips on their own.

“A daughter.”

He sees the boy open his mouth when the sound of the sliding door makes them look to Antonios’s ‘brother’ – Nicholaos – stepping into the room. Walter drops to the tatami and tries to drag himself away, only to be grabbed and thrown over the other’s shoulder like his captor is merely picking up his coat. Indifferent to the child’s futile squirming and defiant cries, the man turns and walks back the way he came. As he’s carried out, Walter looks down, and their eyes meet. He says nothing, only stares frowningly at Hannibal as though to confirm what he’d suspected. *You’re afraid*.

++++

Neither Walter nor her people come back as Hannibal falls to practising his calligraphy. He works silently, listening to the sound of the brush moving against paper. No Abigail challenging him with her quiet scepticism. Just the shape of the characters sweeping left and right before lifting into the air. Sitting at the low table, he pauses with brush in hand to observe his replication of another Basho. The blood already losing its intensity.

The dragonfly can’t quite land on that blade of grass.

The door of his memory cracks open and he sees them in the hotel bed. Will lying atop him before the alarm scatters the calm before the storm. It’s not enough, being trapped beneath the man’s weight. The

feeling of freefall living inside him like a ghost. The emptiness that reigns in the absence of conflict and fills him with perpetual longing for the next clash.

His eyes return to the paper. He is pleased with the way the characters look. Carefully sets the scroll aside before glancing again at the reference book and dipping the brush into the well. The excess is coaxed off the horse hair against its hard edge before the first stroke is made.

A cicada shell.

He thinks about Walter. *Who have you lost?* And the unusually prolonged developmental phase of the Magicicada. A thirteen year cycle. *A daughter*. Seventeen years for some.

It sang itself

Wonders what Will would do if Walter became motherless.

Utterly away.

And gains himself a new guardian.

++++

[*Shinigami 20:03-23:47*]

Lunch is taken in the same room, after the table is cleared of its calligraphy equipment. The inkstone empty when it is swapped for one of many appetising small dishes. Antonios's replacement takes up his post behind Hannibal as she joins him at the table. Insisting, after a sip of her sake, that he reads to her the works he'd selected to reproduce. As he does, he wonders what conversation she'd had with a certain Egyptian having caught the lingering scent of his hookah smoke. Understands there is a reason her guests are not eating together. The same kind of reason you would not sleep with two snakes loose in the same room. Whether or not you believe you have managed to remove their fangs.

She asks him, out of curiosity, what art piece he would create from *the mother and child*, and he refers to the legend of hitobashira, the story of a bridge built on human sacrifice. To which she gives the example of Maruoka Castle.

"They never kept their promise to the mother, of course," she says whilst watching him lower his sake cup. "To make her son a samurai."

"What was their punishment?" he asks.

"Flooding."

"A mother's wrath."

"Indeed."

A pause as he gazes thoughtfully at the busy surface of the table. Feels her eyes on his face.

"We could keep ours," he offers lightly.

"In what manner," comes the curious response, and when he looks up, he is met by that shrewd smile. "You want the boy," she states. "To preserve the memory of his stepfather."

He looks down before saying in a quiet voice:

“He was barely one to-”

“Darling.”

He looks up obligingly.

“You reek of guilt,” she says slowly with feigned sympathy, the steel of her stare cutting into him through her lashes. “A dip in the onsen ought to do the trick.”

Her smile is loaded with promises, just as Will’s lack of one did not diminish the hope of escaping themselves on a trip to the beautiful hot spring featured on the cover of a hotel brochure. To find him a cure for his pain. His sickness of the heart. They should have gone. Together.

“I should like that,” he says with unmasked regret.

++++

He comes across Molly on his way to the onsen. Her question haunts him long after he leaves her. *Where is Will?* He doesn’t know. And just like her, he has become their plaything. Wondering what will happen. When they will see him again. Asked why he spoke to the mother, he talks about the impact of stress on the quality of meat. Can barely admit to himself that he’d empathised with the woman he avoids thinking about every day they’re together. Were together. He had never experienced grief like that before, mistaken or otherwise, and before he knew what he was doing, they were exchanging words. Sharing hope. It was strange to think that for the briefest moment, they had made the most tentative of connections before withdrawing back into their respective selves. No doubt it would have troubled Will if he’d seen, he thinks to himself. And tries to recall the times the man had been angry enough to lash out. Abuse him. Hold his heart in his fist.

“I do believe you are falling asleep on me, doctor.”

His eyes slip open at the dry statement. Sees her regarding him with an arched eyebrow. Her hand pausing on his uncooperative flesh.

“Forgive me,” he says. “I’ve had trouble sleeping…”

A thoughtful hum as she releases him to lean back against the edge of the pool on her elbows.

“Nothing a few hours won’t rectify, if you would be so kind as to pardon my absence,” he adds politely.

“But of course.”

++++

Her show of generosity had been deceptive, however. Not long having returned to his room, he is jumped by the ‘brothers’ and held down as she enters. Seating herself at the low table, she proceeds to light and smoke from a traditional kiseru. Watching Nicholaos put his fingers inside him whilst Antonios pins him against himself. The rough handling reminds him of Will, and he closes his eyes to the expressionless face of the Russian. Swallows against the hard press of a muscular arm as he feels himself begin to leak uncontrollably. Friction soon builds and the thrusting digits pause. The sound of spitting. Loud in the relative silence of the room. Moisture paving the way for harder and faster thrusting until, all of a sudden, he ejaculates inside his shorts, and the hand slips out of the leg hole.

He hears her hum thoughtfully as they leave him catching his breath on the tatami. Looks up to see her watching him from the corners of her eyes as she smiles around her pipe.

“Sleep well, doctor,” she murmurs before walking out of the room with the brothers following.

Chapter End Notes

Hostess 5'11 / Hannibal 5'11 / Mohamed 5'10 / 'Antonios' 6'3 / 'Nicholaos' 6'2

Translation in order of appearance:

“Shinpaishinaide” - “Don’t worry.”
“Watashi wa jisatsu shimasen” - “I won’t kill myself.”
“Koks apgailėtinas vaizdas” - ‘What a sorry sight.”

Yōkai

Chapter Notes

Chapter intended to be read to the cover of 'Lovely' by Lauren Babic and Jordan Radvansky: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CZjZ9VMHzo

They told him the Japanese workforce employed by the Hostess will be forced to change allegiance should she be successfully toppled from her throne. There is no need to fight them all, they'd explained. They just need to take down *the queen*. His temporary allies, Kenjiro and Ichiro, possess all the necessary know-how in terms of technology and architectural knowledge to show them the scene behind the screens and the best way of getting inside the sprawling old building, should it become necessary.

Sat in the small space of the bunker, watching live hidden camera footage streaming from a building standing just metres away above ground, Will wonders how long his temporary allies have been anticipating the Hostess's downfall. One of them always sits beside him. Today, it is Kenjiro, and Will senses something in the air whenever the man shares proximity with Chiyoh. Perhaps she is still angry at him for knocking her unconscious and stowing her in the boot of her own rental car. Or maybe it's simply the crackle of two dangerous people sizing one another up from opposing corners of a claustrophobic den. Either way, Will would rather they left him alone with the screens – it's unpleasant enough, witnessing his wife and step-son being toyed with while he does nothing. He doesn't need the presence of others to testify to their pain and his staying put.

When they see the Hostess travelling the corridor with both Antonios and Nicholaos, however, Will is glad of the company should a threat suddenly present itself on screen. Until he realises they are about to witness a sexual assault. Sitting there, he stares at the monitor with blood thrumming in his ears as his hands slowly curl into fists atop his thighs beneath the desk. The audacity of their actions throws fuel onto the inferno that burns not only from rage alone, but a deep and all-consuming jealousy inseparable from arousal. It is the beastly latter that threatens to stir him from his seat, and if the red mist hadn't descended so swiftly, he would be ashamed to admit the torment of his family had not provoked as strong a response. It's over in no time at all, and his hearing gradually recovers from the hard throb of his pulse. He becomes aware of his company again, and sits back in the hard chair, feigning indifference to the sight of Hannibal lying on the floor even whilst acknowledging the silent

air of humiliation as the man slowly picks himself up onto his feet and makes his way to the bathroom.

++++

They expect her to come to Hannibal again. Or that he will go to her. Either way, after what he'd witnessed on screen, Will is ready to put an end to her games, and Kenjiro explains a way to incapacitate the staff running the ryokan. From the serving girls to security, all employees operating on the premises take their dinner in the form of set meals prepared for them by the head chef. Unbeknownst to the latter, they can make it so an extra ingredient will have made its way into the immaculate contents of their bento boxes to ensure all members experience the same debilitating food coma. The sedative ought to be potent enough to put everyone out of action while the Hostess and her two right hand men are occupied deeper within the building. Will doesn't particularly care about the method itself. Only that it results in Hannibal being extracted and brought back to him.

Later, watching the screens, they notice Nicholaos heading off alone and look collectively to Chiyoh who, carrying her sniper rifle, is already on her way out of the bunker.

++++

Like a cat, Mohamed finds himself roaming the ryokan as he pleases, pretending there are no unspoken restrictions to his stay. In actual fact, he has been cut off from the outside world following the Hostess's suspicions of foul play. They leave him with no means of contacting his people. Have essentially made him hostage by association. But that doesn't mean he can't enjoy himself whilst his captors maintain their show of generosity. And yet. A man can only remain satisfied for so long with good food and endless bathing. He needs things to play with. Living, breathing things. Thus his eyes light up when he discovers one of her boys – the taciturn redhead – sitting alone in a pool not too far from the master bedroom. If Mohamed is not invited to her highness's orgy, he shall instead express his indignance at the expense of her pretty underling.

Facing away with his back to him, the man doesn't move as Mohamed approaches, bare feet slapping quietly upon the damp flagstones. An oni mask sits on the floor by the pool. Shedding his robe as he approaches the water, Mohamed scoops up the mask and pulls it on before stepping into the steam and sliding himself leisurely into a sprawling sit beside the other. He watches his stoic profile through the eyeholes until that dark gaze swivels towards him from the corners.

"Boo," he says, low and emphatic, before pushing the mask up to reveal his amused smirk. "Do I scare you, Mr look-out boy while mommy fucks them senseless," he chuckles before cursing in Egyptian. Whipping the mask off his head, he exhales while carding his fingers through his curls. "Life's a bitch, no?" he drawls, wafting the mask before his face. "I would very much like to fuck a beautiful woman in this pool right now, and all I have is you." Sighing dramatically, he leans back grandly on his arms, chest puffing. "As your honoured guest, I demand first dibs when the girls are showing us their Hello Kitties."

"No girls," comes the toneless response, and Mohamed curses again before looking askance at that expressionless face. Those eyes staring impassively at the horizon.

"Hey…" he murmurs, voice dropping an octave suggestively. "You know how to blow? Cos you sure as Allah have the lips for it, my friend."

"As do you."

Whipping a handful of water at the other's face, Mohamed calls him something colourful in his own language, his accent thick with exaggerated indignance.

"A *king* does not *suck* the *dick*," he states haughtily before adding with a sniff and glance at his fingernails, "However, he may accept a mutual handshake."

The lack of a response leaves them listening to the gentle lapping of water against the boulders – invite enough to Mohamed as he feels the corner of his lip curl. Sliding closer, he tugs the mask down over those short red tresses before plunging his hand through the water. A muffled grunt of surprise slips out from beneath the wood when he grabs the man's penis and immediately feels fingers grabbing the hair at the back of his skull.

"Wrong head, my friend," he chuckles lowly. "You have three seconds to find the right one before I snap this nice Russian dick in half."

As those eyes stare unblinkingly at him through the eyeholes, he feels the grip on his hair tighten spasmodically before just as quickly letting go. Shaking his freed curls, he runs a lazy hand through them as his other crushes its digits against rigid flesh and begins violently to tug. The man arches against the boulders. The mask stifling his groan.

"Two seconds-"

His grip turns bruising, strangling forth another muted cry.

"One-"

The subtle crack of wood and bone is abrupt, but familiar, and Mohamed doesn't need to witness rolling white in the eyeholes to curse and drop like a rock to the bottom of the pool.

++++

Not long after she had started making her way to Nicholaos, his voice had come through in the earpiece, telling her he's going in.

"I'm not on the roof," she'd whispered impatiently. *Just stick to the plan, Will*. When no response had made its way back to her, she'd cursed a white flurry into the cold night air before continuing on her way.

Now, she can hear time ticking as she waits for Mohamed to resurface and give her a better angle. Unfortunately, he proves surprisingly good at holding his breath. *Hmph*. She wants to wait. Beat the man at his game. But she needs to get into position for when the Hostess or Antonios emerges from the room.

++++

They were supposed to wait for the Hostess and Antonios to venture out so Chiyoh could eliminate the latter from her vantage point. Then Will would emerge to demand the Hostess stepped down. That was it. All they had to do was wait. And watch.

So Will watched.

++++

Hannibal knows there isn't much use in resisting. If he doesn't comply willingly, they will simply make it even more ugly and undignified. This way isn't so different to that time in Rome. He just likely won't be able to do to the Hostess and Antonios what he did to the art student and his girlfriend after they had finished filming. And while he doesn't believe the Hostess is intending on filming their performance, he likes to think it will still have an effect on a certain curly-haired individual. Knowing others have derived pleasure from his humiliation. Used him as well as he has done. Perhaps even better. When they're eventually reunited, he will make sure to tell Will everything he'll have missed. Hoping time will not dull the edge of the knife. *If* you see him again, he hears her voice say, but pushes it back down the dark depths of his deeper musings. That strange and lonely space where survival is instinctive yet void of meaning. He cannot allow himself to wade any further into it. Refuses to relinquish all that he is, *all that he is yet to be*, as they keep telling him, to the lowly act of drowning in despair. Wishing with a sudden, almost violent urgency to vacate his mind palace, he opens his eyes to the Hostess lying beneath him upon the bed. Her hair fanning against black satin like a nefarious gold nimbus. Her hand weighing the conviction of his biology as a mere earthly being.

"I believe you are ready, doctor," she murmurs, fingers clenching hard around him. Red lips wide with a lopsided smirk. At the statement, he feels Antonios withdrawing his fingers. The pressure on his prostate disappearing before the blunt head of a penis pushes itself into him. Her eyebrows loft amusedly. He holds her gaze whilst being penetrated. Face relaxed and impassive as his body is gradually forced to house the entirety of that fleshy tool promising to unravel him for her pleasure.

++++

He watches her guide Hannibal into herself before lifting her long legs to prop her ankles on his shoulders. Her arms folding leisurely beneath her head as Antonios snatches a handful of their captive's hair and tugs forcefully to make the latter arch his spine.

"Hold your hands behind your back," the man instructs, and Will can see the undulation in Hannibal's throat as he swallows.

"Is that necessary?" he murmurs, voice a little taut from the grip forcing his head back.

"We have plenty of time to explore the merits of asphyxiation," she chuckles lowly as her assistant takes Hannibal's wrists and pins them to his lower back.

"As you wish," he says as though his opinion has any currency in the situation, unresisting as Antonios slips the strip of plastic from between his teeth and cinches those scarred wrists together with practised ease the same time his hips pull back.

Will closes his eyes to the rhythmic sound of skin slapping against skin. Doesn't open them again until he is stood up and turning his back on the screens.

"I'm going in," he tells Chiyoh, finger leaving the button on the earpiece before he can hear her protest.

"If anything goes wrong inside that room, there will be no immediate assistance," Kenjiro reminds him in a mild voice. "There is no vantage point available to your gunwoman," he adds. But Will is barely listening. His ears bleeding from the sound of Hannibal's rape. Without responding or looking back at the bystander sitting before the monitors, Will makes his way to the bunker's exit.

++++

It is a short distance from bunker to the actual ryokan. Getting inside the architecture itself takes a little more time, but the blinking dot does not hesitate on his tracker. Equipped with the knowledge given him, the American is making good time despite his injuries. Running on his hot-headed adrenaline. Possibly to his death. Possibly not.

They told him how she came to acquire the ancient premises. Of the many tricks they played on the previous owner until torturous thoughts of a haunting possessed her mind like an infection that no amount of praying or the fog of incense generated by countless cleansing rituals in the name of *kami* then Buddha could alleviate. In true spirit of the *yokai* they strove to imitate, the blond haired demon enjoyed watching the old woman lose her mind. And the straw that broke the camel's back – a trap door they'd formed by cutting lose one of the ornately painted squares in the wooden ceiling of the master bedroom – returns tonight to serve the demon's scourge. As the Westerners say, Kenjiro thinks to himself: *karma is a bitch.*

++++

He can hear them from below. The sound of coupling bodies clear in the relative silence of the roof cavity. Grasping the handle of the trap door with one hand, he uses his other to draw the knife.

++++

Past Hannibal's head, she sees the sudden black sliver of roof cavity.

"Above!" she barks to Antonios who immediately pushes off Hannibal, sending the man pitching forward onto her with a grunt. Eyes on their assailant dropping onto Antonios, she wraps her limbs around Hannibal to stop him turning to the sound of struggle. Staring at the smaller man's back, she murmurs into his ear, "I can give you a child," before a gasp catches in her throat at the sight of Will Graham's jerking arm and the red flood beginning to pour from Antonios's opened throat.

++++

He inhales, too. Feeling his chest pressing against hers as his lungs fill with air, dragging the scent and taste of blood through his passages. Believes she would be laughing, now, if the blood belongs to the enemy. But her eyes, when they return to him, are stoical. She doesn't look away when footsteps approach the bed, and he in turn continues to hold her gaze as he catches the familiar smell of sweat and releases at last the breath he has been holding since waking alone for the first time on the premises.

Will.

++++

Stopping behind Hannibal, he cuts the cable binding his wrists and sheaths the knife at the small of his back before grabbing and pulling the other up onto his feet the same time she presses up on her arms and brings her legs together.

"How nice of you to drop in, Mr Graham," she says icily, leaning her naked body to the side as Antonios staggers past them and half collapses into her receiving hands. His blood pouring into her lap as she strokes his hair and shushes him soothingly. Grip firm on Hannibal, Will lofts his brows as he watches down at the woman and her dying lapdog.

"Thanks for the invite," he says casually, pushing the man in his arms forward to steer him away from that serpentine stare before it can attempt to hypnotise him into staying. On their way to the door, Will

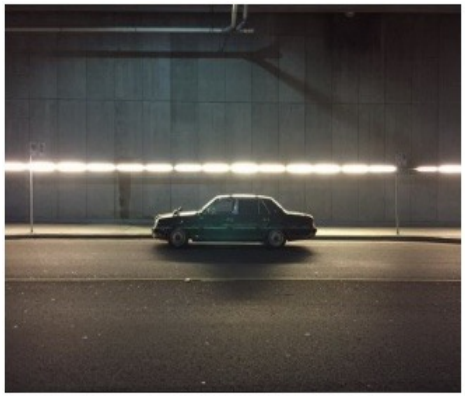
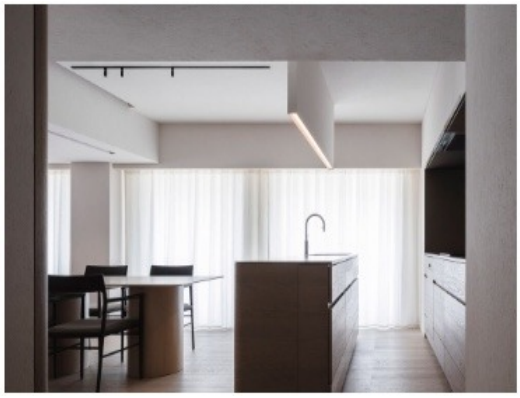
bends to pick up a robe before pushing it into Hannibal's arms. As he straightens, he looks back over his shoulder and sees her kissing lips that can barely move and defend themselves against the hungry violence of her tongue. Half expects to see her shedding her human skin before swallowing the man whole.

Sukidesu

Chapter Notes

> Where chapter is marked 0:00-4:44 it is intended to be read to 'Wicked Game' (ft Annaca) by Ursine Vulpine: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-2hUmoaPfU

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His eyes haven't left the rearview mirror since they set off. There's no need to watch the road. They had already explained beforehand where they would be taking them. And Will believed in their agreement enough to sit back without attempting to murder the driver. Not that he ruled out the necessity completely. But if the enemy of their enemy had wanted them dead, they could've left their bodies back at the ryokan. So he kept his attention on the passenger sitting alone in the back with the doors locked – just in case. Hannibal's reflection remains the same, though the man no longer sits in darkness as they approach the city. Cold rays of street light wash over his sharp profile intermittently, ghosting over half drawn eyes and a face void of expression as he gazes out the window. Every now and then, he sees a subtle undulation in Hannibal's throat, as though he is swallowing down words attempting to scale his windpipe. Will is sure he knows he is being watched. Yet despite this, Hannibal does not look over for the remainder of the journey.

Eventually, they leave the sleeping metropolis above ground to slip down the slopes of underground parking. Spiralling tightly within the confined space, they finally come to a stop, the headlights of the car illuminating the closed doors of an elevator. With the engine idling, Will takes the keycard handed to him by the driver and returns the terse nod before opening his door and climbing out of the vehicle. The click of the back doors being unlocked is loud in the relative silence of the car park, and he suddenly finds himself bracing for an attempted escape. Hannibal remains sitting, however, and Will can see he has turned his face from the window as he steps up to open the door. At the touch of the handle, Paris returns to him. The icy evening breeze teasing through his curls as he stands there, leaning down at the open door of the taxi, waiting for Hannibal to take his hand. The sense of occasion and theatre lending the night an air of indulgence. Something that is absent now as he watches the other step out. His eyes fall to the white tabi socks touching concrete. In Will's haste to vacate the premises, he hadn't paused to consider Hannibal's footwear. As the man straightens, holding the edge of his under kimono closed, Will regrets not having taken the moment to shed his coat and toss it at the other before throwing himself into the passenger seat. Pushing the car door shut, he glances at the faintly curious look on Hannibal's face before starting to walk ahead towards the

elevator doors. When he doesn't immediately hear the sound of footsteps following, he pauses to look back, and finally meets that hooded gaze. Knits his brows when he fails to read it.

"Are you coming?" he utters, continuing on his way to mask the paranoid fear of feet turning and pegging it back to the car that sits in waiting; he doesn't have any concrete evidence to justify this nagging fear – only the words he thought he'd heard her murmur whilst he'd struggled with Antonios. To his relief, he hears Hannibal closing the distance behind him, and presses the button for the elevator when they are standing abreast. The doors glide open without delay and they step in together to face another set of doors while the ones behind them slide to a close. Will touches the keycard to the black panel and keeps it clasped in his hand as he runs the other slowly through his hair. They ascend in silence. No comment or question from Hannibal. Content, it seems, just to wait.

++++

Exiting the elevator, he follows at a step behind Will. Enjoying the faint crackle of tension running between them. The rigid set of those shoulders in front of him. Muscles coiled tight. At the end of the short, spot-lit hallway is a single door crafted from expensive-looking wood and unembellished except for its chrome handle and card reading mechanism. He waits as Will presents his card. Doesn't proceed until the other has entered the apartment and is holding the door open for him.

++++

He watches Hannibal walk inside and closes the door, pushing down on the handle to check it is secure before pocketing the keycard. Turning, he sees the other standing there, taking in the minimal décor lit up by the soft glow of modern backlighting. Dressed all in white, he reminds Will of a ghost.

"Your room's down the corridor to the right," he says, taking a step closer. "You should shower," he adds. "Get some rest."

"Are you staying?" he finally hears the man speak, and comes to stand beside him.

"My room's across the way," he answers with his eyes on the dimly lit passage ahead.

When Hannibal doesn't immediately respond, Will continues to say,

"You should find everything you'll need in your room. The tests we can do later."

"Tests?"

Will keeps his voice neutral.

"For unprotected sex."

"If you deem it necessary."

Yes I do, Will wants to say.

"I suppose they trusted me to be clean," Hannibal adds, and Will bites his tongue.

He's downplaying what happened.

"Like I said. Your room's on the right."

++++

After showering and towelling dry his hair, Hannibal pulls on the guest bathrobe and steps out into the corridor. Watching the closed door of Will's room, he listens for sounds on the other side. In the silence that passes, he asks himself what he would do if Will were to abandon him here in some luxury apartment. Owner unknown. Agreements unknown. Safety difficult to gauge. Venturing barefooted into the open plan layout of the spacious apartment, his eyes sweep across the stark and minimalist furniture. As though in answer to his own question, they move onto the spotless kitchen and finally settle upon the door of what he suspects to be the fridge.

++++

It's a laborious process, taking off the ab binder and changing the dressings. He'd expected some bleeding when he'd made the decision to go in. The sensible thing for someone held together internally by stitches would be to take a back seat. Opt for minimal exertion. It had been reckless to jump in, jacked up on painkillers and adrenaline. Waiting would've been the right thing to do. But that part of him had been done waiting. The part that had made him almost drop his knife a beat before he'd opened Antonios's throat in favour of using his teeth. That same visceral urge more commonly found in animals fighting tooth and nail for the privilege to mate. Will has found its reins since the tumble. Just doesn't quite know what to do with them.

Pacing into the living space in lounge pants and a clean tee, the faint tinkle of glass on glass makes him look over to the kitchen. Hannibal is stood on the other side of the breakfast bar, filling a small sake cup with the contents of an expensive looking bottle he's helped himself to.

"I would ask if you'd care to drink with me, but I assume you're taking something for your injuries," he says with his eyes on the cup. A glance at the bottle makes Will suspect this isn't his first mouthful. He approaches the other side of the breakfast bar where he continues to stand instead of using the barstool, watching Hannibal lift the cup to smoothly drain its contents. As it lowers, those dark eyes look up into him, and Will thinks he can hear the preliminary drag of hoof against dirt.

"Where is your family?"

The first tentative locking of horns.

"Safe."

"Are you sure?"

The push to gauge what pushes back.

"As sure as I can be."

"And the cost?"

He doesn't have an answer for the question. Hannibal puts the cup down and picks up the bottle. Begins to pour.

"There's a price for everything," he continues to say.

"I'm aware of that," says Will.

++++

He feels the other's eyes on him as he puts down the bottle and returns the cup to his lips, pausing generously to provide an opening in which Will may explain further. When nothing comes, he slowly

downs the contents, washing down the words before they can bubble out with unchecked emotion.

Am I your bargaining chip, Will?

Instead, he asks as lightly as he can manage, the question that has been plaguing him since he was carried off semi-lucid by Antonios in the bowels of the Mori Art Museum.

“What are your injuries?”

Words that had ravaged his brain like a disease and left him, at the peak of its fever, as useless as he has ever allowed himself to become. Caught off guard *again*. *Pitiful*.

“He stabbed me twice,” says Will tonelessly. “Perforated the small bowel. Got away with next to no damage control.”

“How fortunate.”

“They sewed me up. Treated the blood loss. Identified a fractured rib.”

“Old Jack put you through the wringer,” he murmurs, inevitably recalling his own run in with the man in Florence.

“I guess.”

“Is he really dead?”

“He looked pretty dead when I staggered past.”

“Where did you go?”

“Down. They had an ambulance waiting.”

“Ah.”

“Their own surgeon.”

“To make sure you lived?”

“They came and made him announce my death.”

“They?”

“The reason we’re here now.”

Hannibal hums thoughtfully as he puts down the cup and picks up the bottle. Steady in the building of cushioning toxins.

Am I your bargaining chip, Will?

“In exchange for her *dethroning*, they agree to turn a blind eye to our departure,” Will explains.

Our.

Lifting the cup, Hannibal’s gaze remains on the worktop as he stops short of the rim touching his lip.

“From Tokyo as opposed to this world,” he says.

“Considering we’re here and not buried out in the sticks,” comments Will drily.

For now, Hannibal wants to say as he tips back the potent beverage.

“Like *he* ought to be,” Will continues to utter, and he regards that look of malcontent on the other’s face. The familiar pinch in his brow. He swallows the mouthful of sake.

“Mohamed?” he speaks the man’s name with disinterest.

“Chiyoh couldn’t get the right angle.”

“Was it part of the agreement?” he asks.

“Personal preference,” comes the flat response, and he sees those half drawn eyes fixate on a point past his shoulder before the man adds, “She should’ve waited for the bastard to surface.”

Feeling the tug at the corners of his mouth, Hannibal returns his attention to the business of refilling his cup. *Štai kur jis. Mano aistringas berniukas.*

“She saved him for you,” he says with quiet amusement. Feels the pause of consideration and the weight of his stare.

“For us.”

Us.

At the curt correction, he lifts the cup back to his lips. Drinks slowly from it as he finds and holds that gaze.

Where is your wife, Will?

“Where is Chiyoh?” he asks instead.

“Taking a break.”

“My girl’s worked hard,” he says fondly.

“She is,” Will admits, gaze dropping.

“As is yours,” Hannibal murmurs. “And the boy.” He watches the other continue to avoid meeting him in the eye. “He’s brave,” he adds, attention returning to the empty vessel in his hand. “Angry, maybe, that you got him and his mother in danger again.” The bottle is noticeably lighter when he picks it up.

“He has a right to be angry,” says Will, matter-of-fact, and Hannibal lowers his lashes at that frown.

“How do you propose to make it up to them this time?” he asks in a hushed voice. Sees Will turn his face to the side. Head tilting at the lack of an answer, Hannibal cannot resist driving the knife deeper.

“They’ve forgiven you before,” he murmurs softly with false hopefulness.

“More times than I deserve,” says Will without cheer.

“Sometimes we hurt the ones we love the most.”

The words are out before he has tested the sharpness of their double edges, and he stops observing the man to swiftly pour himself another. Downs it a touch too quickly and almost chokes on the wave of loss that surges like reflux, reminding him of how it had felt. Facing what he thought had been the consequences of his actions and, regardless of how mistaken he had been, the mortal guilt that he’ll carry for having almost caused the other’s death. To think there had been a time when Hannibal Lecter wouldn’t bat an eyelid at such things. Guilt and regret. *What horrors have you cursed me with, Will?*

++++

He watches Hannibal knocking it back. The mention of family summoning to the forefront of his mind her words – her *promise* to give Hannibal a child – until his jaw flexes at the premature stab of betrayal. Licking his lips, he waits for the cup to return to the worktop.

“So was it rape this time?” he asks lowly.

The tiny clash of glass. The slosh of sake.

“You mean to ask if I was enjoying myself,” says Hannibal, voice light. His eyes lidding at the cup being lifted. Will continues to stare past it at that mild expression.

“Did you?” he asks.

“Enjoy myself?” the other asks back.

He watches that mouth opening and sake being tipped inside.

“Finish,” Will corrects.

“I believe we were interrupted.”

Will feels the subtle flexing of his jaw again at the flippant response.

“If you’re wrong,” he begins to utter.

“I become a father,” says Hannibal simply. “Like you.”

A deliberate pause.

“You disapprove?” the man asks.

Will doesn’t answer. The apartment is silent. Then:

“If it’s what you want,” he says. As light as he can manage whilst meeting that dark gaze and watching the lofting of those invisible brows.

“A family of my own to continue the feud? Montagues and Capulets?”

“Sounds about right,” he utters flatly.

The bottle leaves the worktop as Hannibal pours himself another then sets it back down in exchange for the cup. Immediately drains its contents.

“I suppose we’ve already sacrificed one daughter,” he says thoughtfully.

“You’re not exactly recoiling from the idea,” Will drawls in a low voice.

Something flickers in the black depths of Hannibal’s eyes as the man stares into him.

“Did you recoil from the prospect of becoming a family man?” he asks superciliously. “If I recall correctly, you rather threw yourself at it like a rutting pig.”

Hands darting to his hips, Will glances askance with a scoff.

“You let me throw you over the cliff and *I’m* the rutting pig,” he utters under his breath.

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Yes, Will. Remind me of your curse. Of the fool you’ve made of me.

Hannibal can feel his eyes narrowing on their own accord. His fingers testing the delicate glass of the cup.

“Were you aroused, Will, when you watched Antonios rape me?” he says, voice provocatively quiet.

“If you can even-”

“Because I strongly suspect my suffering to be the only requisite to your pleasure in life these days."

A scoff.

“Am I wrong?”

Never have Will’s eyes looked as blue as when the man is staring at him in conflict.

“You needed his dick up your ass to get it up,” comes the quiet sneer, the coarse words blowing life into Hannibal’s fire.

“Perhaps Molly suspected the same when you failed to satisfy her.”

“Leave Molly out of this.”

“Do as I say, not as I do.”

“I wasn’t the one who attracted their attention-”

“I can’t help being attractive.”

“-yet everything you do, you do just to get mine,” says Will lowly, and Hannibal cannot help the bitter curling of his lip. The man having touched one too many nerves.

“Are you calling me desperate, Will?”

How infuriating.

“I’m not calling you anything.”

To be seen like this.

“Except of course daddy when I have a child of my own.”

The ugly thing that one becomes.

“If that’s what you want.”

“Maybe it is,” he says, finally putting down the cup as Will’s hands find purchase on the worktop.

“Well you’d best go back and fuck her properly, then,” he drawls snidely whilst leaning across marble. Drawing temptingly close to the near empty bottle.

“Maybe I will.”

“I’m sure that bastard’s gagging to lend you his dick.”

“Thank you for the reminder. I’ll be sure to send Mohamed an invite.”

He sees the clenching of Will’s jaw.

“You do that,” he says through his teeth before pushing off the bar and turning away.

“Because I’m good at those,” adds Hannibal.

“Yeah,” he hears Will utter derogatively as the man walks away. “Opening your legs and bending over.”

He stares at that back through his lashes.

“Isn’t that why you came for me?”

Will stops.

“Not that you can fuck me anyway without tearing your sutures,” he murmurs. “You should have left me there for another three years.”

A pause as he waits for Will to turn and storm back to him. Instead, the man resumes walking away, and Hannibal feels his brow contort as something fragile gives way inside his clenched fist. Gaze lowering onto his unfurling fingers, he briefly observes the broken pieces before dropping them to grasp the bottle.

0:00-4:44

Another bottle and a half later, he staggers slowly down the corridor towards the open doorway of Will’s room. Reaches the threshold and leans against the doorframe to look in. Finds the other sitting up in bed. The smell of disinfectant in the air.

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He knows Hannibal is there. Ignores him as he continues to stare through half drawn eyes at the paper pad balancing atop his thigh. The page still blank.

“What’s that?” he hears the man drawl. The sake rinsing the eloquence from his words. When Will does not reply, he sees the other enter his peripheral vision and drag himself across the room towards him. Feels his weight half collapsing onto the mattress at Will’s feet. Past the edge of the pad, he can see Hannibal propping his head up precariously with a hand, but continues to avoid eye contact as the

man begins to speak again.

“A drawing?” he slurs.

Will says nothing.

“A poem?”

Silence.

“A letter?”

He takes a quiet breath.

“…a letter.”

Feels eyes on his face.

“Of farewell.”

A long pause as once lucid cogs take their time to turn and Will struggles to put pen to paper. Then, in a thoughtful voice:

“Will you read it to me, or do I wait until morning?”

“It’s not for you,” he finally answers, and feels a shift in weight as Hannibal drags himself up the bed to claim the space between his legs with a mumble of “Yes it is,” before his face drops to the tender wreck of his abdomen. Grunting in discomfort, Will drops the pen and grabs Hannibal’s head between his hands, lifting to stop the man faceplanting his injury.

“I tried not to,” he murmurs, eyes barely open as he looks up at him.

“What are you talking about?” Will murmurs back frowningly.

“His penis was small-”

“I don’t want to know,” Will exhales.

“I tried not to think of you,” Hannibal continues to murmur. “Imagined she was Molly-”

“That’s enough,” he says, closing and opening his eyes.

“But it didn’t help-”

“I don’t care if you liked it,” Will sighs, leaning back against the pillows.

“I did like it.”

He exhales again as Hannibal continues to talk.

“Pretending you were fucking me into your wife.”

He closes his eyes.

“I can give you a child-”

“Stop, Hannibal-”

“Be a family-”

“I said stop,” Will half growls through his teeth from the effort of grabbing and pushing Hannibal over onto his back beneath him. He sees the tremble in the man’s throat as he swallows and licks his lips. It takes a moment for Will to realise he is staring down into a face wracked with anxiety.

“I can share,” he can see the words leaving Hannibal’s lips. Can barely recognise the broken sound of his voice. Feels the knot tighten in his brow and stomach.

“I can’t,” Will struggles to say himself, and hears the weak snatch of breath.

“I see,” the man half whispers, and, transported by the black wavering depths of that bottomless gaze to the wild, rolling seas that came between them that night, Will feels his face pinching.

“No you don’t,” he utters lowly, and sees the useless parting of those lips before he clasps his hand over Hannibal’s mouth the same time the deluge makes its unbidden escape from hooded eyes. Fingers close slowly around his wrist. Will lets them pull his hand away sluggishly. Watches the man attempt to swallow down tears that have already evaded him before he opens his mouth again.

“Alri-”

Will cuts him off with the bruising crush of his lips. Caught off guard or delayed by the sake – perhaps both – Hannibal lies there unmoving as Will kisses him hard. His lips slack and pliable. Wet with liquid salt. Sensing movement, he catches Hannibal’s wrists and pins them to either side of his tousled head. Continues to kiss the man until neither of them can breathe, then kisses him some more. The room grows loud with their intermittent gasps. Sharp snatches of air when Will allows them to surface. They stay like this until he tires from the fading efficacy of the painkillers. Lifting his head, he watches down at closed eyes and swollen lips. *He’s fallen asleep*.

Ignoring the ache of his body, he remains hovering over the other a moment longer. Dips his head down again to press his lips to the long scar on the inside of one wrist, then the other before pulling on the sash and opening the front of that robe for better access to the side of his neck. He kisses and sucks softly at the scar over his jugular, breathing in deep before letting it out in one long stroke down his naked body, his mouth ghosting past chest and stomach to close about the star Hannibal had gained on the bluff. Each of them serving as a jealous reminder. *They’ve left their mark on you*. He takes a dissatisfied breath. *But where are they now?* Lets it out shudderingly before sinking his teeth into the top of Hannibal’s thigh. Subjecting that defenceless body to the first of many bites. His arousal steadily increasing with each one until it becomes unbearable. *Yet I’m still here*. It’s true what Hannibal had said. He won’t be able to fuck him without upsetting his sutures. But that’s fine. *Forget everyone else*. He will mark him regardless. *None of them matter*. Pulling himself out of his shorts, he takes one of the other’s hands. Holds it clasped around his cock as he starts to move, grunting softly as he pumps in and out of the tunnel of Hannibal’s digits, pausing the once to coat them with his spit. Panting as he nears, he stares at that sleeping face while squeezing hard on Hannibal’s hand. *I’m all you need*. Uses it to hurriedly bring himself to the edge before, with a loud, pained groan, he suddenly finds release emptying himself in an explosion of erratic spurts. Watches them lash violently at the gently rising and falling chest. Collarbones. Cheek. Some of it getting caught in strands of Hannibal’s hair. *You’re all I need*. Leaning over the mess he’s made of the man’s body, Will catches his breath. His hand clasping the unsoiled cheek of the other’s face. The pad of his thumb pressing over lips parted faintly to Hannibal’s sleeping breaths. *We’re all we need*.

Chapter End Notes

Translation:

"Štai kur jis. Mano aistringas berniukas" - There he is. My passionate boy.

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